



THE
*M*ERCHANT
*R*EPUBLICS

Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg,
1648–1790

MARY LINDEMANN

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The Merchant Republics

Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, 1648–1790

The Merchant Republics analyzes the ways in which three major economic powerhouses Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg developed dual identities as communities of commerce and as republics over the course of the long eighteenth century (c.1648–1790). In addition to discussing the qualities that made these three cities alike, this volume also considers the very real differences that derived from their dissimilar histories, political structures, economic fates, and cultural expectations. While all valued both their republicanism and their merchant identities, each presented a different face to the world and each made the transition from an early modern republic to a modern city in a different manner.

Mary Lindemann is Professor of History at the University of Miami. She is the author of four books and of numerous articles. She has also been the recipient of several major grants and awards, among them the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities; the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health; the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences and the Humanities; the Flemish Institute for Advanced Study; and the Shelby Cullom Davis Center, Princeton University.



BURSA, exstructa, A. 1608 mercatores recipiens, A. 1623; aucta, A. 1668. | De BEURS, op den Binnen Amstel: tusſen
 Kalver-ſtraat en de Nes.
 P. Schenk excu. Amſt. C. Priv.

FRONTISPIECE: Amsterdam Exchange

The Merchant Republics

*Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg,
1648–1790*

MARY LINDEMANN

University of Miami



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For Michael, yet again . . .

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Acknowledgments

All books have a checkered past and this one proves no exception. It began life as a history of crime and civic culture in three early modern cities. As I did that research, however, the sources sent me off in a rather different direction and the result lies before you. One book became two, and parts of the original research appeared in 2006 as *Liaisons dangereuses: Sex, Law, and Diplomacy in the Age of Frederick the Great* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press).

On that long journey, however, I acquired a large number of debts, professional and personal. I must first thank the several agencies and institutions that generously supported my research over an extended period of time; I originally embarked on the project in the late 1990s. Early on, grants from the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation supported two years of uninterrupted research in archives and libraries in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. The staff at these several archives and libraries were consistently helpful and knowledgeable: the Staatsarchiv Hamburg, the City Archives of Amsterdam, the National Archives of the Netherlands in the Hague, the Felixarchief in Antwerp, the British Library in London, the Royal Library in the Hague, the University of Leiden library, the Erfgoedbibliotheek Hendrik Conscience in Antwerp, the Royal Library in Brussels, the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek and the Commerzbibliothek in Hamburg, the Bibliothèque nationale and the library of the German Historical Institute (Deutsches Historisches Institut/Institut historique allemand) in Paris. A year-long residential fellowship at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (NIAS) and a six-month stay at the Centre for Advanced Studies of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium (VLAC) in Brussels gave me additional time to reflect and write. The administrative and academic staff at both places did all they could to make my stay as profitable as it was pleasurable. Research leaves

and grants from two different departments and universities – the Department of History at Carnegie Mellon University (where I was employed from 1987 to 2004) and the Department of History at the University of Miami (my current academic “home”) allowed me further time for research and writing, for which I am very grateful. In particular, two awards from the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Miami – a sabbatical in fall 2010 and a Cooper Fellowship that allowed me course relief in spring 2011 – facilitated my efforts to finish the manuscript. Likewise, a generous grant from the Office of the Dean, College of Arts & Sciences, University of Miami, helped defray the costs of illustrations and permissions.

Besides these institutional debts, I have also acquired a number of personal ones. Guido Marnef was my “Flemish partner” at VLAC and an invaluable interlocutor on all things Antwerpian. He and his wife, An Kint (from whose dissertation I borrowed the term “communities of commerce”) were excellent companions in all sorts of ways, providing intellectual fodder and serving up delicious dinners. My husband and I first met An in 1997 in the “old” Antwerp archive and she kindly guided us through that particular labyrinth. While a fellow at VLAC, I also had the pleasure of meeting Craig Harline (Brigham Young University) and his wife Paula. Doug Catterall, Cameron University, gave me expert advice and guidance on the intricacies of Dutch spelling and naming conventions. In 2002–3, I and my husband very much enjoyed the company of several colleagues at NIAS, in particular, that of the well-known philosopher of science, Ron Giere (always a good dinner partner), and his wife, Barbara Hanawalt, Professor Emerita, Department of History, The Ohio State University, Koen Kuiper, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, and Dr. Alison Kuiper, University of Sydney, E. M. Sent, Professor of Economics at the University of Nijmegen, Jay Ginn from the University of Surrey, England, and Rudy Andeweg, Professor of Politics at the University of Leiden. In Hamburg, Franklin Kopitzsch, Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Hamburg and the Director of the *Arbeitsstelle für Hamburgische Geschichte*, was extremely helpful and supportive as always. He and his wife, Ursula Stephan, have been friends forever – since I did my dissertation research in Hamburg in 1979 – and we have remained close despite the years and distance. That, too, is also true of my old friends Peter Albrecht, Jill Bepler, and Jochen Bepler who contributed in no significant academic way to the completion of this book but whose warmth and friendship were nonetheless sustaining.

To this already long list of those to whom I am indebted, I should add the two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press who read a long manuscript with great care, scholarly generosity, and speed. My editor at Cambridge University Press, Lewis Bateman, has been the model of a scholarly editor: accessible, prompt, and extremely knowledgeable about history.

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doing research in several European cities together; while he worked on his own book about the twentieth-century maritime world, I labored on mine. He even forgave me for writing another book first (and which he told me not to do) before finishing the “important” one! Even when he is wrong, he is right.

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Abbreviations

AA	<i>Antwerpsch archievenblad</i> . 64 vols. Antwerp: G. van Merlen, 1864–1934.
AARAB	<i>Annales de l'Academie royale d'archéologie de Belgique</i>
ADB	<i>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie</i>
AESC	<i>Annales: Economies, sociétés, civilisation</i>
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
Aitzema	Aitzema, Lieuwe van. <i>Historie of Verhael van Saken van Staet en Oorlogh, In/ende omtrent de Vereenigde Nederlanden</i> . . . 14 vols. The Hague: John Vely, 1627–71.
Antwerpen, 17de	<i>Antwerpen in de XVIIde eeuw</i> . Antwerp: Genootschap voor Antwerpse geschiedenis, 1989.
Antwerpen, 18de	<i>Antwerpen in de XVIIIde eeuw</i> . Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1952.
<i>Antwerpiensia</i>	Prims, Floris. <i>Antwerpiensia: Losse bijdragen tot de Antwerpse geschiedenis</i> . 24 parts. Antwerp: De Vlijt, 1928–54.
AR	<i>Archive für Reformationsgeschichte</i>
BGN	<i>Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanden</i>
BHR	<i>Business History Review</i>
BMGN-LCHR	<i>Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden-Low Countries Historical Review</i>
BMHG	<i>Bijdragen en mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap</i>
Bilderdijk	Bilderdijk, Willem. <i>Geschiedenis des vaderlands</i> . Ed. H. W. Tydeman. 13 vols. Amsterdam: P. M. Warnars, 1832–53.

- Boer Boer, Jan de. "Cronologischer Histoire van alle het geene is voorgevallen, by de komste, van Willem Karel Hend. Friso, Prince van Oranie &ct. als mede, het geene dat er is voorgevallen, onder het plunderen der pactershuysen en verdere revolutien tot Amsterdam in Ao. 1747 & 1748 . . . door den schryver dezès Jan de Boer in Amsterdam," 1747–58. Ms. Filmed copy in SA, Film Nr. 1047–1051. [Original ms. is in KB, Den Haag]
- Bontemantel Bontemantel, Hans. *De regeeringe van Amsterdam soo in 't civiel als crimineel en militaire (1653–1672) ontworpen*. Ed. Gerhard Wilhelm Kernkamp. 2 vols. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1897.
- Boumans Boumans, René. *Het Antwerps stadsbestuur voor en tijdens de Franse overheersing: Bijdrage tot de ontwikkelingsgeschiedenis van de stedelijke bestuursinstellingen in de zuidelijke nederlanden*. Bruges: De Tempel, 1965.
- Brugmans Brugmans, Hajo. *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*. 2nd. revised edn. Ed. Izaak Johannes Brugmans. 7 vols. Utrecht and Antwerp: Het Spectrum, 1972. Vol. 3: *Bloeitijd 1621/1697*. 1972. Vol. 4: *Afgaand getij 1697/1795*. 1973.
- BTG *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis*
- CEH *Central European History*
- CSSH *Comparative Studies in Society and History*
- DBNL *Digital bibliotheek voor de nederlandse letteren*
- EHR *Economic History Review*
- Elias-1 Elias, Johan E. *De vroedschap van Amsterdam, 1578–1795*. 2 vols. Harlem: Loosjes, 1903–5. Repr. Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1963.
- Elias-2 Elias, Johan E. *Geschiedenis van het Amsterdamsche Regentenpatriciaat: Tweede omgeweerkte druk van de inleiding tot "De vroedschap van Amsterdam."* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1923.
- EST *Economisch en sociaal tijdschrift*
- Evenhuis Evenhuis, Rudolf Barteld. *Ook dat was Amsterdam*. 5 vols. Amsterdam: Ter Have, 1965–78.
- FHS *French Historical Studies*
- Frijhoff/Prak-1,-2 Frijhoff, Willem and Maarten Prak (eds.). *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*. Vol. 2, 1: *Centrum van de wereld, 1578–1650*. Vol. 2, 2: *Zelfbewuste stadstaat, 1650–1813*. Amsterdam: Boom, 2004–5.
- GG *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*

HA	<i>Hamburg und Altona</i>
Hamburg	<i>Hamburg: Geschichte der Stadt und ihrer Bewohner</i> , vol. 1. <i>Von den Anfängen bis zur Reichsgründung</i> . Ed. Hans-Dieter Loose. Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1982.
HGB	<i>Hansische Geschichtsblätter</i>
HGH	<i>Hamburgische Geschichts- und Heimatsblätter</i>
HZ	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>
IRSH	<i>International Review of Social History</i>
Israel	Israel, Jonathan. <i>The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
JEEH	<i>Journal of European Economic History</i>
JIH	<i>Journal of Interdisciplinary History</i>
JMEH	<i>Journal of Modern European History</i>
JMH	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
JUH	<i>Journal of Urban History</i>
Klefeker	Klefeker, Johann. <i>Sammlung der Hamburgischen Gesetze und Verfassung in Bürger- und Kirchlichen, auch Cammer- Handlungs- und übrigen Policy-Angelegenheiten und Geschäften samt historischen Einleitungen</i> . 12 vols. Hamburg: Piscator, 1765–74.
Knuttel	Dutch Pamphlet Collection, National Library, The Hague
Mertens/Torfs	Mertens, Franz H. and Karel L. Torfs, <i>Geschiedenis van Antwerpen</i> . 7 vols. + supplement vol. Antwerp: C. de Vries-Brouwers, 1846.
MVHG	<i>Mitteilungen des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte</i>
NDB	<i>Neue deutsche Biographie</i>
NJ	<i>Nederlandsche jaerboken, inhoudende een verhael van de merkwaardigste geschiedenissen die voorgevallen zyn binnen den omtrek der Vereenigde Provintien sedert het begin van 't jaer 1747</i> . Amsterdam, 1748–65
NNJ	<i>Nieuwe Nederlandsche jaerboeken, of, vervolg der merkwaardigste geschiedenissen die voorgevallen zijn, . . .</i> Leiden and Amsterdam, 1766–90
PP	<i>Past and Present</i>
Prims	Prims, Floris. <i>Geschiedenis van Antwerpen</i> . 28 vols. + reg.; Antwerp: N.V. Standaard Boekhandel, 1927–49.

<i>Sammlung</i>	<i>Sammlung der von E. Hochedlen Rathe der Stadt Hamburg so wol zur Handhabung der Gesetze und Verfassungen als bey besonderen Eräugnissen in Bürger- und Kirchlichen, auch Cammer- Handlungs- und übrigen Policy-Angelegenheiten und Geschäften vom Anfange des 17. Jahr-Hunderts bis auf die itzige Zeit ausgegangenen allgemeinen Mandate, bestimmten Befehle und Bescheide, auch beliebten Aufträge und verkündigten Anordnungen.</i> 6 vols. Hamburg: Piscator, 1763–74.
Schriftstellerlexikon	Schröder, Hans. <i>et al.</i> <i>Lexikon der hamburgischen Schriftsteller bis zur Gegenwart.</i> 8 vols. Hamburg: Perthes-Besser und Mauke, 1851–83.
Tirion	Tirion, Isaak. <i>Tegenwoordige Staat der Vereenigde Nederlanden.</i> 19 vols. Amsterdam: Isaak Tirion, 1739–51. Vol. 5: <i>Behelsende Het Vervolg der Beschryvinge van Holland.</i> 1744.
TVG	<i>Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis</i>
TVSEG	<i>Tijdschrift voor sociale en economische geschiedenis</i>
TVSG	<i>Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis</i>
Wagenaar	Wagenaar, Jan. <i>Vaderlandsche Historie, vervattende de geschiedenissen der nu Vereenigde Nederlanden.</i> 21 vols. Amsterdam: Isaak Tirion, 1749–59.
Zedler	Zedler, Johann Heinrich. <i>Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon Aller Wissenschaften und Künste . . .</i> 68 vols. Halle and Leipzig: Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1732–54.
ZHF	<i>Zeitschrift für historische Forschung</i>
ZSW	<i>Zeitschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte</i>
ZVHG	<i>Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgischen Geschichte</i>

Introduction

A tale of three cities

When John Farrington, the erstwhile English consul in Syria, traveled through northern Europe in fall 1710, he, like many other wayfarers, visited the major cities and recorded his impressions in a series of notes. Of Amsterdam, he observed: “[it] is one of the Noblest & Richest Cities in Europe & is very well noted for the Greatness and Exclusiveness of its Trade, wch: extends itself to all parts of the known World . . . [and] the chief strength of it lyes in the Wealth & multitude of Inhabitants, in their numbers of Ships.” Traveling on, he turned north, stopping in Hamburg, “a City that may deservedly be counted among one of the first Rank [located] in a fine Country & good Air, on the River Elbe not far from the Sea.”¹ Our traveler did not make station in Antwerp, perhaps because the city was Catholic, still part of the Spanish Habsburg imperium, and at the time caught up in the War of the Spanish Succession. Others who went to Antwerp came away with similar perceptions. A century earlier, an Italian voyager found Antwerp to be “the market of many lands from everywhere in the world.”² As these observations suggest, economic prowess first and most forcefully impressed all those who stopped in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. They regarded these emporia with awe and wonderment, if occasionally with envy and even resentment. The mid eighteenth-century encyclopedist, Johann Heinrich Zedler, esteemed Antwerp as “a beautiful, great, well-fortified and illustrious merchant city,” similarly valued Amsterdam as “the main town of the United Netherlands and one of the most eminent mercantile centers in the whole world,” and praised Hamburg

¹ [John Farrington, ascribed], “An Account of a Journey thro Holland, Frizeland – Westphalia &c in severall Letters to a Friend,” from August to December 1710, BL, Add. Mss. 15570, 7, 29, 83 (according to the original pagination).

² Quoted in Jan-Albert Goris, *Lof van Antwerpen: Hoe reizigers Antwerpen zagen, van de XVe tot de XXe eeuw* (Brussels: N.V. Standaard-Boekhandel, 1940), 170.

as “a famous, large, rich, and populous Hanse, mercantile, and free Imperial city.”³

If the first impression of each city was its unmistakable imprint as commercial center (*handelsstad* or *Handels-Stadt*), almost as striking was their political make-up; all three were equally renowned (or notorious) as what the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries called republics. “Republic” is a slippery term that contemporaries employed in several ways. The much older idea of republic as a *res publica*, that is, “a state, republic, or commonwealth” and its secondary meaning of “the general good or welfare,” persisted. That definition, however, gathered beneath its broad umbrella multiple political types, from monarchies to states not ruled by crowned heads. The way in which “republic” is used here, conjoined with “merchant” to produce “merchant republic” and, for that matter, “merchant republicans,” is narrower; it denotes a political entity governed by citizens who assumed the task of administration as part of the civic and political duties incumbent on them and who viewed merchants and mercantile values as essential components of that republicanism. This understanding of “republic” remains quite comprehensive, but nonetheless does not sprawl to the point of forfeiting all substance. Early modern people, after all, distinguished between republics and monarchies with little trouble. Still, not all republics were identical and this book argues that profound differences, as well as significant similarities, characterized the three merchant republics of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg.

The vignettes quoted above are typical. Contemporaries unfailingly sorted Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg into the same category but this self-evident, and quite real, sameness veils equally telling dissimilarities. The identity that encyclopedists and travelers projected in their accounts tends to ignore the richness of varied histories and smooths over peculiarities. The historian must ask, as I do here: Were the cities themselves – their economies, their governments, their inhabitants, their political cultures, their religions, and their whole way of viewing and approaching the world – indeed so undifferentiated and so easily subsumed under the one term of commercial republic?

In many ways, all three cities were indeed very much of a muchness. That congruence struck not only contemporaries. Historians, too, have repeatedly linked them as what Fernand Braudel termed the economic “motors” of European civilization and in their status as independent, self-governing entities. However, if early modern commentators and later scholars all remarked the similarities, many also noted differences and sometimes the comparisons fell out to the benefit of one or the other. When Aulus Apronius visited Antwerp in 1677, the greater prosperity of Amsterdam struck him forcefully. “The Exchange . . . was so empty that we met hardly thirty men there during an entire afternoon, while in Amsterdam or London we would have seen several thousands.” The inveterate wag, Karl Ludwig von Pöllnitz, a century later,

³ Zedler, 1 (1732): col. 1810; 2 (1732): col. 727; 12 (1735): col. 333.

pronounced: "Antwerp . . . completely fallen from her previous glory. Once it was the greatest emporium in Europe. Amsterdam fed on her carcass."⁴ Contemporary travelers proved fond of expressing comparisons in the form of cyclical, almost providential ebbs and floods. The Frenchman, Auguste Pierre Damien de Gomicourt, near the close of the century believed that: "The commerce of Antwerp . . . raised itself on the ruins of Bruges. Amsterdam avenged Bruges in drawing to its harbor the greatest part of Antwerp's trade." Already, by the late sixteenth century, writers had already taken up the idea that Antwerp's pre-eminence directly profited from Bruges's decline, much as a century later Amsterdam would benefit from Antwerp's "devastation."⁵

These observations fail to mirror actualities faithfully, of course. Even on-the-spot witnesses often misjudged circumstances or lacked the background to interpret them, turning away in perplexity from situations locals found no need to ponder. Nonetheless, their views reflect a pertinent reality and one prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Scholars, too, have tended to stress the features these cities shared and slot them into similar historical pigeonholes. Letter-writing wayfarers like Apronius, Pöllnitz, and Gomicourt strung cities together along lines of economic growth very much as Braudel later did. Post-Braudelian scholars have often followed suit. Peter Burke pointed out that "the city which benefited most from Portuguese expansion was not Lisbon." It was rather Antwerp that grew fat on the returns from the spice and silver trades. "Antwerp's dominance was," Burke continues, "short-lived," however. Genoa displaced Antwerp by the 1550s, "in other words, before the revolt of the Netherlands, let alone the blockade of the river Scheldt by Holland and Zeeland." The golden calf of economic success subsequently fell to Amsterdam, the last in Braudel's series; "its successors, like Britain in the age of the industrial revolution, were not cities but national economies."⁶

The relay of economic baton-passing Burke postulated is incomplete, however. The immediate heirs to Amsterdam were not national economies per se, but powerful financial and mercantile centers, like Paris and London (connected, of course, to national economies), and other commercial nerve centers, cities like Hamburg, but also Bristol, Charleston, Philadelphia, and Livorno. Eighteenth-century observers would never have forgotten these and certainly would not have passed over Hamburg. One way to write about these cities, then, would be to follow and expand the chronological progression that Braudel and Burke sketched out and examine, in turn, Antwerp at the zenith of its glory between 1490 and 1565; Amsterdam during the Dutch Golden Age, 1580–1650 (perhaps extending to 1672); and Hamburg at the height of its early

⁴ Apronius and Pöllnitz quoted in Goris, *Lof*, 87, 149.

⁵ Auguste Pierre Damiens de Gomicourt, *Le Voyageur dans les Pays-bas autrichiens, ou lettres sur l'état actuel de ces pays* (Amsterdam: Changuion, 1782–4), 3: 7.

⁶ Peter Burke, *Antwerp, A Metropolis in Comparative Perspective* (Antwerp: Martial & Snoeck, 1993), 6–7.

modern commercial greatness, roughly 1750–99. But because this book is not an economic history, it would seem odd to follow a program dictated primarily by economic dominance.⁷ Because my interests are political and cultural (in terms of perceptions, attitudes, identities, and memories), I have chosen instead to compare these cities during the same chronological period, running roughly from the Peace of Westphalia (1648) to the end of the *ancien régime* in the early 1790s, in order to demonstrate how three such “merchant republics” coped in a world poised on the threshold of modernity; the “long eighteenth century” serves as a shorthand designation for this almost 150-year period. The study’s endpoint is probably more apparent and more easily justified historically than its beginning. The 1790s saw the breakdown, if by no means the complete dissolution, of the old European administrative, legal, and political systems and the dawn of the age of the democratic revolutions that drastically recast political life in western Europe. Of course, 1648 is the date of the Peace of Westphalia that created the “Westphalian system” and ushered in the political, religious, and diplomatic settlements that formed the basis of the European Old Regime.⁸ Of necessity, the book frequently dips back into the period before 1648 to elucidate developments and trends in politics, economics, and social practices that continued well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries or, at times, held on even longer.

Moreover, the nineteenth century, too, is a frequent visitor to these pages. Nineteenth-century scholars, and especially local historians and home-grown moralists, wrote a great deal about the “world of our fathers,” sometimes approvingly but just as frequently critically, commenting with head-shaking despair on the decline of traditional virtues, rampant greed, thoroughgoing governmental corruption, cronyism (*Vetternwirtschaft*, *nepotisme*), lamentable innovations in business, and bemoaning bitterly the ostentation and luxuriousness that had corrupted older burgher morals and lifestyles. Nothing changes less than moralistic handwringing; it is perhaps the commonest expression of civic anxiety and one that picks up and repeats older tropes, reviving battles long since won or lost, rehashing triumphs and defeats. That commentary and those analyses have, however, influenced the writing of histories about the

⁷ Oscar Gelderblom has recently written an excellent comparative economic history of Dutch and Flemish cities for an earlier period: *Cities of Commerce: The Institutional Foundations of International Trade in the Low Countries, 1250–1650* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁸ Peter Wilson, *The Thirty Years’ War: Europe’s Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 751–4. The idea of a “Westphalian system” pertains mostly to international relations, but the Peace of Westphalia had profound effects on most western European polities that ranged far beyond the realm of foreign policy, diplomacy, or the concept of nation-state sovereignty. Heinz Duchhardt (ed.), *Der Westfälische Friede: Diplomatie, politische Zäsur, kulturelles Umfeld, Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998) and especially the articles by Heinz Schilling, “Der Westfälische Friede und das neuzeitliche Profil Europas” (1–32) and Reinhard Steiger, “Der Westfälische Friede – Grundgesetz für Europa?” (33–80).

long eighteenth century more profoundly and subtly than one might first imagine. Major political and philosophical concepts, such as corruption, were to a large extent constructed by nineteenth-century authors. Those constructions have embedded themselves deeply in our historical consciousness and have lived on to affect the writing of history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, although they have hardly passed without question; indeed, they have often excited vigorous historical debate. Thus, at several points in the analysis presented here, the historical dialog expands into a three-sided conversation between the long eighteenth century, subsequent histories and commentary (especially nineteenth-century ones), and modern historical methods and inquiries.

Other circumstances, too, dictate these particular chronological divisions. These determinants are political and cultural rather than solely economic (not to suggest, by any means, that one can uncouple these historically or analyze them in isolation from one another). The book addresses not just the economic development of three powerful cities, but rather the self-understanding, social practices, political cultures, and political economy of three *merchant republics*. The phrase is simultaneously a description and an argument.

Both halves – “merchant” and “republic” – require explanation; it is one of those famous metaphorical “empty vessels” into which various historical vintages have been poured. Not everyone in Amsterdam, Antwerp, or Hamburg was a merchant, of course. Not all inhabitants lived from commerce even indirectly or possessed clear connections to the mercantile or financial worlds. Nonetheless, commerce defined them all or, at least, the city they inhabited. Additionally, many characteristics of the merchants described in this book – for example, an emphasis on transparency in business dealings – were by no means peculiar to merchants.⁹ Such broader validity, however, strengthens rather than weakens the case for arguing that merchant values were widespread; even if not exclusively mercantile, neither did they derive solely from the pursuit of trade. A merchant republic was firstly what has been called (in this case, for sixteenth-century Antwerp) a “community of commerce”: a polity that achieved consensus around, and identified itself with, commerce. That understanding glued the community together, despite differences and tensions. Yet, a valuation and validation of merchants’ practices existed symbiotically with a political sense of being a republic.¹⁰

Moreover, while it is natural for historians to have highlighted the role of these three cities as economic pace-makers, and while that economic

⁹ Artisans used trademarks to assure quality in production, thus making that quality apparent, or rather *transparent*, to all. See Bert De Munck, “Skills, Trust, and Changing Consumer Preferences: The Decline of Antwerp’s Craft Guilds from the Perspective of the Product Market, c.1500–c.1800,” *IRSH* 53 (2008): 197–233.

¹⁰ An Kint, “The Community of Commerce: Social Relations in Sixteenth-Century Antwerp” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1996), 1. Similarly, Gelderblom, *Cities*, especially Chapter 2 on “Commercial Cities,” 19–41.

emphasis is anything but misplaced, it is as well to remember, as Simon Schama observed, that “at the center of the Dutch world was a burgher, not a bourgeois . . . [and] the burgher was a citizen first and *homo oeconomicus* second.”¹¹ For a book like this one predicated on the real existence of merchant republics (and not just as ideal types), this inherently political definition channels the direction the volume takes and the interpretations it advances. Concurrent with the identification of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg as merchant republics is their sameness as burgher states where the concept of citizenship served “ideologically . . . [as] an over-arching, non-denominational concept of community.”¹² While religion, or religious differences, could act as acid that ate away at unity and while perceived economic injustices could generate tensions and even hostilities, a commonly held concept of citizenship functioned as an adhesive binding each community together. A generalized affirmation of citizenship, however, did not mean that everyone agreed on what the concept, and the reality, represented. To take a simple example: Could Jews be citizens?

The concept of citizen is, of course, central to discussions of republicanism. The term “citizen” as I have used it on several previous pages may jar some historical sensibilities. The word most historians prefer to describe the members of an urban polity who enjoyed certain specified rights and privileges and who bore political and civic duties is, of course, *burgher* (*poorter* in Dutch and *Bürger* in German). Any understanding of citizen that suggests political equality certainly does not correspond to the early modern category of burgher. For that matter, most early modern cities recognized and granted differing states of citizenship that ranged from those permitted to reside and work in the city to those who could exercise full political rights. The first group was quite large (although not greater than the group of inhabitants who were *not* citizens of any kind); the second usually small, sometimes tiny. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a useful definition of citizen as “an inhabitant of a city or (often) of a town; esp. one possessing civic rights and privileges, [that is] a burgess or freeman of a city.”

That definition corresponds closely to the early modern meaning. It has the further advantage of stressing civic rights rather than political ones as the crucial determinant of citizenship. Thus, the term citizen and burgher are used almost interchangeably here in order to stress two critical points. First, not only those who enjoyed full political rights (meaning access to government office) engaged in politics or political action; the political culture of these cities encompassed a much wider group of people. Second, burgher-citizens greatly valued their civic rights, perhaps even more than their political ones, especially

¹¹ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Fontana, 1991), 7.

¹² Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden, “Tax Morale and Citizenship in the Dutch Republic,” in Oscar Gelderblom (ed.), *The Political Economy of the Dutch Republic* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 165.

in a merchant republic where those civic rights included protection of property and granted economic advantages to citizens that neither mere inhabitants nor aliens possessed. In addition, although they never held political office, women could also possess civic rights as female citizens (*Bürgerinnen* in German or *poorteresse* in Dutch). Finally, the term burgher is frequently used in a cultural context and thus often appears as an adjective: burgher values, burgher lifestyles, and, especially, burgher identities. The word “citizen,” therefore, appears particularly apt for the opening chapters focusing on politics, that of burgher more appropriate for the later chapters on identity and economic life.¹³

If all three cities clustered more or less comfortably within the capacious tent the designation of merchant republic spanned and shared many characteristics, they were by no means identical; differences as much as similarities marked their histories. Whereas the commonalities are immediately visible and constitute structural realities, the differences become apparent when one begins to investigate in depth the mercantile and political worlds of each in comparison with the others. That probing reveals the problems inherent in trying to herd all three cities into the corral of merchant republic. At times the degree of mercantile-ness was more or less pronounced. If each city was a republic in the sense of being more or less self-governing, republican-ness also varied from place to place and from time to time.

Scholars familiar with the history of these cities might find the depiction of them as “merchant republics” somewhat troubling, objecting in almost equal measure to each word. Historians who have closely studied Antwerp’s evolution over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would quickly point out that real trade no longer dominated economic activity. While they acknowledge that the closing of the Scheldt river had by no means throttled Antwerp’s international commerce, fortunes created in these years mostly derived from financing and manufacturing. The evidence here is incontestable and based on diligent archival work.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the continuing mercantile *character* of Antwerp is equally incontrovertible. Trade and finance formed an indissoluble amalgam of many merchant careers, as the contemporary term merchant banker indicates. Even when active trade declined, mercantile traditions, values, and memories persisted and continued to be esteemed and extolled. In Antwerp, however, the high percentage of nobles in government

¹³ OED; HRG, 1: 738–47; Christopher R. Friedrichs describes “the set of inhabitants who made up the acknowledged political community” as “the group of adult males known as citizens, freemen, *bourgeois*, *Bürger* or the like.” *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

¹⁴ Karel Degryse, *De Antwerpse fortuinen: Kapitaalsaccumulatie, -investeren en -rendement te Antwerpen in de 18de eeuw* (Antwerp: Genootschap voor Antwerpse Geschiedenis, 2006); Hilde Greefs, “De terugkeer van Mercurius: Die divergerende keuzes van de zakenelite in Antwerpen en het belang van relatie netwerken na der heropening van de Schelde (1795–1850),” *TVSEG* 5 (2008): 55–86.

and the relative paucity of merchants complicate the picture. Thus, for Antwerp the strength of the merchant-republic appellation in these years is perhaps weaker than for its two sister cities.¹⁵

For Amsterdam, the objections would differ. Active trade remained a central part of the economic make-up of the city, albeit bound up to an even greater degree with finance than in either Antwerp or Hamburg. Many historians of Amsterdam would, I think, more vigorously dispute my characterization of Amsterdam's citizens as merchant republicans, or at least suggest that the term needs to be applied with considerable caution. First, they would point out that in Amsterdam by the middle of the seventeenth century (and probably earlier), a professional governing class, an oligarchy of the famous Dutch regents (*regenten*), had developed and its members simultaneously retreated from commercial pursuits. They subsequently devoted themselves to governing as their vocations, although never as a group divorced themselves from trade entirely and remained deeply involved in banking, finances, and commercial speculations. Admittedly, men who actively engaged in trade seldom made the leap into the golden circle of regents.¹⁶ That historical interpretation, too, has long been accepted and a good deal of truth adheres to it. At the same time, the separation between oligarches and merchants or between governors and merchants was never entirely clear cut. Mercantile life continued to thrive in Amsterdam (if not as expansively in the eighteenth century as before 1672), even as finances increasingly assumed more weight. Thus, practices in governing and trading continued to dominate a great deal of rhetoric, political and moralistic alike, precisely because they were also urban realities.

Perhaps the tightest overlap between merchants and governors existed in Hamburg. Although domestic troubles often brewed up around charges that some members of the government acted as monarchs and treated other citizens as subjects, the disjunction between active traders and members of the most important governing councils loomed less large. A professional ruling class, akin to the Amsterdam regents, never took root in Hamburg. Indeed, such a development was to some extent constitutionally prohibited. The majority of seats in the city council, for example, went to merchants by law. In Hamburg, as also in Amsterdam and Antwerp, far more important for understanding the demography of government was the increasing number of those trained in law, but that was a phenomenon that pertained almost everywhere in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century continental Europe.

Several other features determined equally important, and sometimes critical, dissimilarities. None of these disparities, however, ruptures the boundaries of merchant republic nor erases major likenesses. Sheer size was one easily observable difference: Amsterdam's population numbered about 200,000 by the mid seventeenth century; Hamburg only approached 120,000 toward the end of

¹⁵ Antwerp in earlier centuries fit the mold perfectly, of course. Gelderblom, *Cities*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

the eighteenth century; and Antwerp remained much smaller with only about 65,000 people in 1700. Religion was another: Hamburg was the Lutheran “orthodox Zion of the north,” Antwerp a Catholic bulwark, and Amsterdam mostly Calvinist but, like the Dutch Republic as a whole, lacked a state church. Each city harbored resident religious minorities (if in differing proportions), including some economically prominent ones among their Catholic, Jewish, and Mennonite populations.¹⁷ Urban economic fortunes diverged as well. Each city knew a “golden age,” although the characteristics of each *âge d’or* varied as did its timing. Antwerp took pride of place as the greatest entrepôt of the sixteenth century; Amsterdam’s economic power reached its zenith in the mid seventeenth century; and Hamburg thrust its way into the economic limelight only after 1750.

Politically, too, the cities displayed manifest similarities and dramatic contrasts. All three were republics and not only in the broad sense of a polity or public affairs (*res publica*). All three often described themselves as a *respublica mixta* referencing thereby the almost universal idea of the perfect state as one combining aristocracy, monarchy, and democracy in roughly equal measures. Outside observers, too, viewed these cities as partaking of, as here for Hamburg, “something of the Democratical, and something of the Aristocratical.”¹⁸ More important in functional terms, each city governed itself or at least controlled its internal affairs. Obviously, the degree of freedom each had to determine its own fate varied. One must acknowledge, for instance, good reasons for regarding Antwerp as not very much of a republic during the long eighteenth century, considering its position within two different Habsburg empires: the Spanish and the Austrian. Still, and especially in its self-understanding and in its political memory (particularly of the Calvinist Republic of 1577–85), many politically active Antwerpeners insisted on viewing the city as a republic and argued for its traditional liberties as a republic.

The fundamental dialectic between commonalities and divergences carries over into debates about early modern republicanism. The idea of republicanism proves every bit as complex as that of republic. Surely no work has guided the discussion of republics and republicanism more profoundly than J. G. A. Pocock’s magisterial study of the “Machiavellian moment.” Praised and

¹⁷ Joachim Whaley, *Religious Toleration and Social Change in Hamburg, 1529–1819* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

¹⁸ Martin van Gelderen, “Aristotelians, Monarchmachs and Republicans: Sovereignty and *respublica mixta* in Dutch and German Political Thought, 1580–1650” and Hans Erich Bödeker, “Debating the *respublica mixta*: German and Dutch Political Discourses around 1700,” both in Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, vol. 1: *Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 195–217, 219–46; Thomas Lediard, *The German Spy, or, Familiar Letters from a Gentleman on his Travels thro’ Germany, to his Friend in England* (2nd edn.; London: Cooper, 1740), 178n.

valued, or criticized and attacked, as a “grand ideological synthesis,” the book’s impact persists. Since its publication in 1975, it remains virtually impossible to discuss the subject without acknowledging *The Machiavellian Moment* as a benchmark.¹⁹ The book’s brilliance rests on the author’s perception of a “single intellectual phenomenon” that developed over a millennium, stretching from the medieval world, through the age of Machiavelli, and ending in debates that animated political thought in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England and America. Pocock’s Machiavellian moment occurred when a republic confronted the problem of maintaining its stability and the political virtue that sustained it. Accordingly, political commentators of the time located a major cause for the decline of republican virtue and civic commitment in the loss of independence. The lure of wealth and, especially, wealth gained through commerce, created or tended to create dependence that inevitably weakened, and eventually obliterated, civic commitment.

Much debate on republicanism, or on “the republican alternatives,” continues to revolve around just these issues. Besides remarking the innate inclination for republics to degenerate into anarchy or fall to tyranny, contemporaries also perceived them as inherently unstable and even feeble political entities for reasons besides the inertial yet also seemingly inevitable loss of virtue. How could republics forestall, for example, the decline of civic virtue and prevent the dissolution of the polity altogether, considering their haphazard political organization and their general military impotence? The Old Swiss Confederation, for example, baffled early modern observers. With its limited territory, weak political structure, and lack of a dynastic center, why was it “one of the most durable confederations in the history of the world?”²⁰

Pocock’s synthesis, therefore, has not gone unchallenged. What Pocock termed “the quarrel between virtue and commerce” seems unsuited as a useful analytical category for anyone seeking to understand political cultures in mercantile centers like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. In these merchant republics, commerce was never seen as antithetical to republicanism or to virtue, despite the repeated fulminations of moralists.²¹ In Amsterdam and

¹⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Cesare Vasoli, “*The Machiavellian Moment: A Grand Ideological Synthesis*,” rev. art. *JMH* 49 (1977): 661–70.

²⁰ See, for instance, André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen, and Maarten Prak (eds.), *The Republican Alternative: The Netherlands and Switzerland Compared* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008). The quote comes from Andreas Würzler, “The League of the Discordant Members’ or How the Old Swiss Confederation Operated and How it Managed to Survive for so Long,” in *ibid.*, 29. Admittedly, the Dutch Republic was for a time a significant military power or, at least, able to finance major military campaigns and the Swiss provided mercenaries for many European states.

²¹ See, in particular, Wijnand Mijnhardt, “The Limits of Present-Day Historiography of Republicanism,” *De achttiende eeuw* 37 (2005): 75–89; Jonathan Israel, “Monarchy, Orangism, and Republicanism in the Later Dutch Golden Age” (Second Golden Age Lecture, Amsterdams Centrum voor de Studie van de Gouden Eeuw, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 11 March 2004).

Hamburg, merchants were certainly “in charge” (to employ Clé Lesger’s felicitous term).²² Even in Antwerp, where the nobility dominated the magistracy numerically, merchants and merchant virtues were seen to underpin and anchor the republic. Debates over the ills of commerce and commerce’s ability to enervate republicanism necessarily loomed less large in these aggressively proud mercantile cities. Moreover, all three urban governments remained throughout, at least in domestic affairs, masters in their own houses, ordering their lives according to their own ideas and ideals. All three remained, in this sense, self-governing republics.

Nonetheless, the adjectives self-governing and republican conceal as much as they reveal. Antwerp, after 1585, had forfeited much of its independence, was incorporated into the Spanish Netherlands (and became part of the Austrian Netherlands after the Peace of Utrecht in 1713), and lost political ground to Brussels. Tied as it was first to the Spanish and then to the Austrian Habsburgs, Antwerp was caught up in the repeated conflicts between the Habsburgs and the Bourbons in the seventeenth century, suffering severely during the Wars of the Spanish (1701–13) and Austrian Successions (1740–8). Amsterdam formed part of the voting (*stemhebbende*) cities of the Dutch Republic. As the most powerful member in the state, it was usually the most fervent champion of “true freedom” (*ware vryheid*) and the most consistent foe of the stadhouders’ ambitions. Thus, Amsterdam, unlike Antwerp, actively participated in governing a major European state as well as in founding, administering, and exploiting a huge overseas trading empire and vast business enterprises in the form of the Dutch East India Company and, later, the Dutch West India Company. It also bankrolled the military endeavors of the Dutch Republic, including, albeit often reluctantly, the wars of Willem III. Hamburg possessed the remnants of its older identity as a Hanse member. Although Frederick Barbarossa had chartered Hamburg as a Free Imperial City in 1189, the Danes contested that status until the middle of the eighteenth century when the Gottorp Agreement (1768) finally ended their pretensions. Surrounded by Danish, Prussian, and Hanoverian territories, Hamburg sought to preserve its neutrality at all costs. The constitutional connection with the Holy Roman Empire became most evident in times of troubles when, as in the late 1600s and early 1700s, the emperor dispatched commissions to the city to mediate unrest. By the eighteenth

The two-volume work edited by van Gelderen and Skinner, *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, published several articles that emphasize the ways in which commerce and republicanism coexisted. The conference on “The Limits of the Atlantic Republican Tradition” organized by Margaret C. Jacob, Catherine Secretan, and Wijnand Mijnhardt at the Clark Library/UCLA Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies, 17–18 April 2009 explored these issues at length as did an earlier conference on “The Perception of Early Modern Capitalists,” which produced a volume edited by Jacob and Secretan, *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

²² Clé Lesger, “Merchants in Charge: The Self-Perception of Amsterdam Merchants, ca. 1550–1700,” in Jacob and Secretan (eds.), *Self-Perception*, 99–122.

century, Hamburg's trade networks spanned the globe, but, unlike Amsterdam, it never advanced beachheads of empire.

Despite their admittedly peculiar character, the merchant republics also shared much with other cities and city-states, especially in terms of political structures. In a short survey, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Cities*, Christopher Friedrichs points out that although each city's constitution possessed a unique structure, there existed, nonetheless, "fundamental uniformities in the way in which . . . [they] were governed."²³ The word "constitution" in the sentence above may seem confusing or anachronistic. Early modern constitutions were not single written documents like that of the United States, which was, after all, extremely unusual for its time. But neither can they accurately be termed unwritten. Urban constitutions consisted of charters, privileges, recesses, and agreements concluded over time and usually consigned to paper, although often not made public or not fully publicized. The wording and meaning of such documents remained open to interpretation and modification. Groups and individuals drew their rhetorical ammunition from these constitutional parts and marshaled them to fit their own political wishes and substantiate their own political agendas in battles that were acerbically discursive as well as physically violent.

Friedrichs noted another commonality: each early modern city had "an acknowledged overlord," although there were exceptions, like Venice. Amsterdam, too, was such an oddity; the stadhouder was not an overlord but rather an alternative power in the Republic. Hamburg was directly (*unmittelbar*) subordinate to the Holy Roman Emperor. Antwerp had a king or emperor as its overlord in Madrid or Vienna and answered as well to an intermediary representative (a governor) of that higher power who resided in Brussels. More importantly, a council or councils governed each city. Smaller cities might have had just one. In major centers, like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, hierarchically ordered and interlocking councils formed typical arrangements. Here politicking took place. Early modern cities were often "restless" (*onrustig, unruhig*) and restiveness could escalate into street violence, but tensions also played out, and played out with far greater frequency, in the give-and-take and the push-and-pull of intra- and inter-councilar confrontations.²⁴

Councils governed cooperatively if not necessarily harmoniously. In each urban case handled here, certain councils wielded considerably greater power and were more selective in choosing their members than others. Nonetheless, despite the power inequalities that pertained everywhere, no council was constitutionally, or actually, insignificant or expendable. Their members made great efforts to preserve at least the façade of concordant interaction. If consultations often only proceeded *pro forma*, they were rarely neglected entirely.

²³ Friedrichs, *Urban Politics*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Thomas Lau, *Unruhige Städte: Die Stadt, das Reich und die Reichsstadt (1648–1806)* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2012).

Although the possibilities for political action or participation varied from city to city, all three reserved political niches, that is, seats in these councils, for people who never reached, nor dreamed of reaching, the most elevated ranks of *burgemeester*, senator, *schepen* (judge), or *schout* (sheriff). These lower offices formed crucial arenas of political action and sites where political cultures unfolded; here too, of course, political disputes arose.

Thus the range of offices in each city that extended upwards from the parish or *wijk* (district or quarter) allowed for more extensive political participation or at least vocalization than one might first anticipate. Occasionally, these posts served as stepping stones to the pinnacles of political power or reservoirs from which candidates for higher positions emerged. More frequently they provided the only office a man held and represented his sole political activity. Their relatively limited political role, however, rendered them neither inconsequential nor undesirable. Citizens valued these lesser positions and used them skillfully to assert opposition to, or support for, policies and individuals. (Of course, some jobs in the parish, *wijk*, or city proved distasteful, time-consuming, costly, and burdensome; it was hard to find volunteers for them and pressure sometimes had to be exerted.) Obviously, not everyone fitted into this system, but it would be wrong to assume that the more exclusive, and admittedly more puissant and prestigious councils – such as the *vroedschap* and the *burgemeesters* in Amsterdam, the *magistraat* in Antwerp, or the *Rat* and *Senat* in Hamburg – perched at the apex of the urban political pyramid acted completely independently or, for that matter, arbitrarily. Consultation formed a structural part of the process, although to different degrees in each city. Violations, or perceived violations, of that procedure triggered discontent, dissent, and even revolt.

Nonetheless, at the highest political levels, power circulated narrowly. In Hamburg, for instance, of the some 3000 persons eligible for office, only about 300 were politically active. It is a truism that small groups controlled a city's political fortunes and made critical decisions. Yet such groups of families, often albeit misleadingly termed patriciates or oligarchies, rarely dominated long and then in only a handful of places. In Venice the elite was closed and legally limited to a specified number of families. Even there, however, scholars have fiercely debated the effective degree of closure actually achieved or even intended.²⁵ In the merchant republics, as in most early modern European cities, power rested with a limited number of families but the composition of that charmed circle could shift quickly and sometimes drastically. The foundations of their affluence and influence, their ability to hold on to both, and their

²⁵ Franklin Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte der Aufklärung in Hamburg und Altona* (2nd edn.; Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1990), 150–3; Friedrichs, *Urban Politics*, 19–20; Gerhard Rösch, “The *Serrata* of the Great Council and Venetian Society, 1286–1323,” in John J. Martin and Dennis Romano (eds.), *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 67–88.

social characteristics by no means looked the same everywhere. Amsterdam's regents differed in wealth, longevity in office, perquisites, and exercise of power from Hamburg's senators, or from Antwerp's magistrates, and so, too, did the way in which they structured their alliances and moved through their respective *cursus honorum*. The extent to which each group regarded the holding of office as an occupation or, alternatively, as an unpaid civic duty, diverged as well. Each city fought, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, to preserve its right to appoint members to governing councils without outside interference. Each determined the degree to which those outside these *sancta sanctorum* could affect decisions. Although basic structural elements in each government and the issues that could disrupt civic harmony differed, corruption (or charges of corruption) remained a common trope.

Hierarchy and inequality suffused every aspect of governing in early modern Europe and the merchant republics proved no exception. Equally critical to any analysis of politics and political cultures is, however, a deeper comprehension of the dynamics of politicking, that is, how politics "got done" on a quotidian basis. The first rule of thumb is that politics remained overwhelmingly reactive in nature. Thirty years ago, James Allen Vann observed that those involved in governing the Duchy of Württemberg were not future-oriented; that is, they expected the future to look much like the past. In the shaping of policy, as in the actual process of governing, they projected "no five-year plans."²⁶ One might argue that by the middle of the eighteenth century, and in the penumbra of Enlightenment (or perhaps earlier with the onset of a "radical enlightenment" in the later seventeenth century),²⁷ the possibilities of large-scale social change existed as real political goals held not only by radicals but increasingly by proto-bureaucrats and rulers of territorial states. Nonetheless, everyday governing in the merchant republics remained conservative in its ambitions and objectives; it responded to situations as they arose and dealt with them on a practical, day-to-day basis, seeking to resolve problems one at a time and hunting for immediate solutions that would restore the status quo and civic peace rather than working permanent alterations. That observation does not exclude the existence of political philosophies or at least does not deny that some political traditions were cherished as reliable guides to contemporary issues even in a world seemingly awash in change. It does indicate, however, that the arguments

²⁶ James Allen Vann, *The Making of a State: Württemberg, 1593–1793* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 22.

²⁷ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). In the preface to the second edition of *The Radical Enlightenment* (Lafayette, LA: Cornerstone Books, 2006 [1981]), Margaret Jacob argued that "beginning in the 1680s northern and western Europe experienced a series of shock waves that in turn produced a new radicalism in thought both in matters political and religious" (vi).

for, or against, policies and actions tended, and tended strongly, to be based on what went before.

The other quality these early modern cities shared was the continued emphasis placed on the individual and the individual instance. This was not, obviously, an affirmation of individualism or certainly not individualism in any modern (or post-Revolutionary) form. Rights, liberties, privileges, and, for that matter, duties adhered to groups in society not to single persons and were thus held and exercised communally or corporatively. Yet the concept of citizens' rights underlay the whole edifice of civic government and shored up the proper functioning of urban society; it existed in economic as well as political spheres. Citizens enjoyed, for instance, economic benefits that non-citizens did not, including freedom from some taxes and tolls. Political battles, like charges of corruption, brewed up over individual cases; it was the malfeasance of a particular burgomaster, the financial fiddles of a certain treasurer, merchant, or Jew, and the misdeeds of a well-known judge that provoked action. These people had names, faces, families, and connections; contemporaries knew them in the full roundness of their biographies.

Thus in these "communities of commerce," in these merchant republics, identity was neither solely that of merchant nor of citizen; it was both simultaneously. Undoubtedly, as important as these two weighed, they were not the only identities inhabitants of the three cities possessed: many others existed and were determined by, for instance, religion (based on the divide between Christians and non-Christians, but also between various confessions); occupation (academic, guildsman, pastor, day-laborer, and so on); gender; neighborhood; associational life (confraternities, civic militias [*schutterijen* or *Bürgerwache*], chambers of rhetoric (*rederijkerkamers*), and the like); and age. All situated a person in the multi-stranded social and political webs that endowed urban society with structure and flexibility. In terms of civic life broadly cast, merchants (in an expanded sense that includes the financier and rentier as well as the active trader) and politically active citizens (those eligible for office, whether or not they actually held one) were the identities that mattered most.

Religion, too, strongly affected and at times even set the tone of *political* life in these cities. The political alliances and divisions religious differences forged between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants in early seventeenth-century Amsterdam (and the Dutch Republic as a whole) and its less fevered echoes in the latter part of that century, entwined with and perpetuated the tensions between the *prinsgezinde* (those loyal to the Prince of Orange) and the *staatsgezinde* (republican) positions. In Antwerp, the restitution of Catholicism after the defeat of the Calvinist Republic and resistance to the toleration edicts of Joseph II in the 1780s and 1790s profoundly shaped political affairs. Finally, in Hamburg, "one theme ran consistently through the constitutional history of the city after the Reformation: the search for purity of faith," a

quest which several times exploded into violence.²⁸ Likewise ridiculous would be any attempt to exclude the influence of European-wide political and diplomatic events; these larger affairs repeatedly insert themselves into the narrative and analysis here.

The focus on merchant republics and on business, commerce, and finance, does not argue for the primacy of economics nor suggest its particular ability to determine politics. This book instead considers a peculiar affinity in politics and economics as a central element distinguishing all three merchant republics. It is also very much a study of political economy in the sense of how political institutions and the economic system influenced one another. No causal unidirectionality is implied. Rather, as the definition of political economy indicates, complex interdependencies, exchanges, and reciprocities characterize the interactions between politics and economics. The political economy of each city resembled the others yet also possessed unique structures and moved to the motions of unique political mechanics.

In sum, to make the idea of merchant republic work as a historical concept requires a comprehensive look at the dynamics of both political and economic life in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg and that is how this book proceeds. The first chapter introduces the three cities by comparing their histories in broad strokes, concentrating on the political and economic realities prevalent in each over the course of the long eighteenth century, sketching out how similar events affected each polity, and delineating how each city confronted different political and economic challenges. [Chapter 2](#) analyzes political ideas and the governing structures that embodied and actuated them; it isolates the politically active strands for closer examination. By pinpointing moments of dissension, identifying sources of harmony, and addressing causes of stability and instability, the chapter explains how each city strove to maintain civic equilibrium. It also initiates a discussion of the prevailing understanding held by the merchant republics and merchant republicans of being republican islands in a monarchical ocean. This concept runs throughout the book, but it is most thoroughly developed in [Chapters 2–4](#). [Chapter 3](#) continues an analysis of how governing proceeded on a quotidian basis by focusing on the moments when the machine of politics seized up producing the political noise of discord and dissent. One trigger was corruption and the chapter presents corruption as a *primum mobile* in the evolution of municipal policies.

[Chapter 4](#) shifts gears and analyzes how inhabitants of the merchant republics crafted their identities and located their place in the world about them. Furthermore, it places citizen and merchant identities in opposition to those of nobles and urban republicanism in opposition to monarchism.

²⁸ Israel, 421–77; Derek Beales, *Joseph II, vol. 2: Against the World, 1780–1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 271–332; Prims, 9: 72–3; Whaley, *Religious Toleration*, 23.

Citizens in merchant republics valued transparency as the *ne plus ultra* of civic life and that desideratum resonated throughout their political and economic discourses. Its exact meaning, however, and the best way to achieve it produced cognitive conundrums and real dilemmas. The prism of the imposter separates these complexities into single issues and makes it possible to home in on the political and economic significance of those who were not what they seemed to be. Imposters, in short, posed negative counterparts to the merchant republican and threatened, at least rhetorically, the integrity of the Republic.

Chapters 5 and 6 transfer the argument from the political world to the mercantile and economic realms. They consider in detail the ambiguities involved in doing business over the course of the long eighteenth century and explore the tortured path that merchant ethics often followed by investigating in depth the economic side of the merchant-citizen dyad: the man (or, for that matter, the woman) of business. Explicitly compared here are the moralistic rhetoric and the exigencies of business life. The last chapter employs a close analysis of bankruptcy to reunite the merchant and the citizen halves in a final evaluation of the interdependence of politics and economics and of republican and mercantile identities in three cities whose economic and political fates tracked so clearly in many ways and diverged so profoundly in others.

A topographical perspective

Every neophyte geographer understands that “topography” indicates the “accurate and detailed delineation of any locality,” even if she or he might dismiss it as an old-fashioned practice unworthy of the modern scholar’s attention.¹ In the early modern world, however, the term was fashionable and deployed in multiple instances extending beyond geography to works of history, philosophy, and psychology. John Milton spoke of the “huge topography of his own vain thoughts” and Thomas Reid of “the topography of the mind.” Andrew Ure would later value the topography of textile manufactures as “a most interesting subject of philosophical research.” To understand the interface between politics and economics, between merchants and republicans, the historian requires just this bird’s-eye perspective and a mapping that meticulously charts the metaphorical heights and plains, rivers and frontiers, floods and droughts of early modern life as a *vade mecum* to guide one safely and surely in unknown territory or through disorienting historical labyrinths. An eighteenth-century voyager could rely on contemporary topographies and guides, such as Jonas Ludwig von Heß’s *Topographical, Political, and Historical Description of Hamburg* and Jan Wagenaar’s *History of the Fatherland* and so, too, can the twenty-first-century historian.²

¹ OED.

² John Milton, *An Apology against a Pamphlet call’d A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus* (London: John Rothwell, 1642), 10; Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid & J. Bell, 1764), 280; Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures, or, An Exposition of the Scientific, Moral and Commercial Economy of the Factory System of Great Britain* (London: C. Knight, 1835), 67; Jonas Ludwig von Heß, *Topographisch-politisch-historische Beschreibung der Stadt Hamburg* (3 vols.; Hamburg: Bachmann und Gundermann, 1796); Jonas Ludwig von Heß, *Hamburg, topographische, politisch und historisch beschrieben* (2nd edn., 3 vols.; Hamburg: Selbsterlag, 1810–11); Jan Wagenaar, *Vaderlandsche Historie*,

As essential as these volumes are, however, they only begin to serve our scholarly needs. A modern political map must integrate the close vision of the insider with the expertise of later scholarship and the demands of rigorous historical analysis. Our contemporary topographer must attend carefully to the identifying characteristics of a specific locale, emphasizing its political peculiarities and yet also situating them within the broader spaces of urban life. The political landscape was a built rather than a natural environment and the movements of the men and women who inhabited it also determined its layout. Implicitly, therefore, early modern politics encompasses a broad array of interests and actions that cross and blur the boundaries historians have traditionally drawn between economics, politics, culture, and morality.

Contexts: demographics, economics, religion

The most obvious characteristic distinguishing each of these three merchant republics from the others was simply size. That relationship, however, changed substantially over time. A once large city (Antwerp) shrank with breathtaking speed and a smaller one (Hamburg) expanded just as strikingly; yet the timing of those shifts by no means coincided. From the sixteenth century onwards, Amsterdam held pride of place in terms of sheer numbers, reaching a population of at least 175,000 in 1650, increasing to about 230,000–240,000 by the 1730s. Despite a perceptible decline in growth, its shift to a “large city size” proved permanent.³

Antwerp’s population moved to very different rhythms. Here we find no smooth curve of either growth or, for that matter, decline but rather slow, sometimes almost imperceptible, recoveries and sometimes catastrophic drops. In the mid sixteenth century at the high tide of Antwerp’s prosperity and greatness, over 100,000 people lived in the city. Antwerp’s pre-eminence, however, proved a short-lived phenomenon that spanned only the period from about the 1530s to the disastrous year (1585) when the Spanish seized Antwerp. Population plummeted to slightly more than 48,000 in 1586.⁴ In 1755, a

vervattende de geschiedenissen der Vereenigde Nederlanden (21 vols.; Amsterdam: Isaak Tirion, 1749–59).

³ Information on the continued growth of Amsterdam’s population is taken from recent work, see Clé Lesger, “Vertraagde groei: De economie tussen 1650 en 1730,” in Frijhoff/Prak-2, 21. Lesger gives the following numbers: 1650, 160,000–175,000; 1680, 210,000–220,000; 1730, 230,000–240,000. On more general deurbanization, see Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perversance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 65. Israel, 309, 621, 1007 presents a picture of population decline in the early part of the eighteenth century. Lesger’s figures are more recent and probably more accurate here. Clé Lesger, *The Rise of the Amsterdam Market and Information Exchange: Merchants, Commercial Expansion and Change in the Spatial Economy of the Low Countries, c.1550–1630* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 20, 46–7, 104, 132.

⁴ Guido Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550–1570*, trans. by J. C. Grayson (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University

mere 42,000 people lived there. Still, substantial movement in the almost two centuries between 1585 and 1755 suggests that the precipitous collapse and permanent stagnation of Antwerp, so much the favored trope of generations of Belgian historians, misrepresents the situation. From the low point of 1580 (40,000), significant demographic revival occurred; in 1612 54,000 lived in Antwerp and, by 1691, 67,000. The subsequent decline over the next half century reflected major economic disorder, although one that was followed by an economic rebirth in the nineteenth century as Antwerp industrialized; it was a development already discernible in the 1780s and 1790s.⁵

Hamburg's population history more closely paralleled that of Amsterdam than Antwerp, although not until around 1787 did it attain large-city dimensions of 100,000.⁶ When the French occupied the city in the early nineteenth century, they effected the first real census; it tallied 100,192 people. As the French census probably under-counted the population by something like 13 percent, one can reasonably estimate a number of approximately 130,000 for the city and its suburbs.⁷

As in most early modern cities, in-migration strongly affected rising demographic profiles. Twentieth-century historians have often noted the centrality of migration for urban growth, but contemporaries, too, recognized that reality and frequently viewed it skeptically. Migrations moved to the pulse-beats of a commercial world that required many casual and seasonal laborers. Besides drawing in useful workers, cities like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg also attracted the flotsam and jetsam of early modern society. Especially in the eighteenth century, each struggled to cope with and control an increasingly burdensome pauper population.⁸

Press, 1996), 5; Hugo Soly, "De groei van een metropool," in *Antwerpen: Twaalf eeuwen geschiedenis en cultuur*, ed. Karl van Isacker and Raymond van Uytven (Antwerp: Mercatorsfonds, 1986), 85–6.

⁵ Jean A. van Houtte, "Déclin et survivance d'Anvers (1550–1700)," in *Studio in onore di Amintore Fanfani*, vol. 5: *Evi moderno e contemporaneo* (Milan: Dott. a Giuffrè, 1962): 715. See also Karel Degryse, *De Antwerpse fortuinen: Kapitaalsaccumulatie, -investeren en -rendement te Antwerpen in de 18de eeuw* (Antwerp: Genootschap voor Antwerpse Geschiedenis, 2006); Hilde Greefs, "De terugkeer van Mercurius: Die divergende keuzes van de zakenelite in Antwerpen en het belang van relatie netwerken na der heropening van de Schelde (1795–1850)," *TVSEG* 5 (2008): 55–86; Catherina Lis, *Social Change and the Labouring Poor: Antwerp, 1770–1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

⁶ Hans-Dieter Loose, "Das Zeitalter der Bürgerunruhen und der großen europäischen Kriege, 1618–1712," in *Hamburg*, 265.

⁷ Heinrich Reincke, "Hamburgs Bevölkerung," in Heinrich Reincke, *Forschungen und Skizzen zur Hamburgischen Geschichte* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1951), 167–200; Hans Mauersberg, *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte zentraleuropäischer Städte in neuerer Zeit: Dargestellt an den Beispielen von Basel, Frankfurt a. M., Hamburg, Hannover und München* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 43, 47–8, 73; Heß, *Hamburg*, 3: 444.

⁸ Lis, *Social Change*; Catherina Lis, "Social politiek te Antwerpen, 1779: Het controleren van de relatieve overbevolking en het reguleren van de arbeidsmarkt," *TVSG* 5 (1979): 146–66;

Along with migrants whose economic resources were slender came talented artisans and enterprising young men and women; the wealthy migrated, too. Few historians need to be reminded of the human flood that gushed out of Antwerp after 1585. Although many went to Amsterdam, commercial cities throughout northern and western Europe all benefited to a degree from the connections, skills, and sheer wealth of the Antwerpeners. Often the human drain and the economic malaise Antwerp suffered after 1585 have been interpreted as almost literally the rubble that other great cities, and especially Amsterdam, used to build themselves up into the economic giants of the premodern world. Historians of both Hamburg and Amsterdam have boasted of the warm welcome extended to those who fled “Spanish cruelties.” While little doubt exists that many found homes in Amsterdam and Hamburg (as well as in other cities, such as Cologne), the cordiality that greeted them varied markedly. Moreover, while it is certain that these migrants contributed to the economic growth and prosperity of these safe harbors, they were by no means solely responsible for it.⁹

Scholars have often painted portraits of Antwerp’s economic life after the troubles of the 1580s in dark shades, gray at their most generous and black at their least. The great Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne, perpetuated the myth, even if he did not create it: in his words, the conquest of the city by the Duke of Parma’s forces dealt Antwerp “a mortal blow.”¹⁰ By the end of the sixteenth century, Antwerp’s halcyon days had ended, seemingly forever. Cut off from the vast oceanic expanses where other countries and cities found their seventeenth-century fortunes, Antwerp’s once-bustling harbor sank to the status of an (admittedly not-unimportant) inland port whose hinterland never promised or delivered what its oppidan rivals, Amsterdam and Hamburg, enjoyed because they straddled far bigger rivers, and had access to more extensive riverways and the seas. Nevertheless, the slide from commercial metropole

Catherina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979); Lesger, *Rise*, 5–9, 101–2, 139–80; Mary Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers: Hamburg, 1712–1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁹ Percy Ernst Schramm wrote voluminously about Hamburg and stressed the city’s record of religious toleration: *Hamburg: Ein Sonderfall in der Geschichte Deutschlands* (Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1964). The belief that Hamburg was especially, or comparatively, tolerant persists, see Erik Lindberg, “The Rise of Hamburg as a Global Marketplace in the Seventeenth Century: A Comparative Political Economy Perspective,” *CSSH* 50 (2008): 641–62. How special Hamburg actually was is open to question, see Joachim Whaley, *Religious Toleration and Social Change in Hamburg, 1529–1819* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8; Mary Lindemann, “Fundamental Values: Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Hamburg,” in Peter-Uwe Hohendahl (ed.), *Patriotism, Cosmopolitanism, and National Culture: Public Culture in Hamburg 1700–2000* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), 17–32; De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 72–8.

¹⁰ Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, Vol. 4: *La révolution politique et religieuse, Le règne d’Albert et d’Isabelle, Le régime espagnol jusqu’à la paix de Munster (1648)* (3rd rev. edn.; Brussels: Lamertin, 1927), 194; Jan A. van Houtte, *Onze zeventiende eeuw, “Onglukseeuw”?* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1953), 3.

to sleepy backwater was never total or irrevocable and Antwerp's economy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century did not reflect abject misery. Foreign merchants who had abandoned Antwerp during the "troubles" often returned. These businessmen engaged in a regular commodities trade and also established Antwerp as a major financial center in the first half of the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the supposedly disastrous closing of the Scheldt did not halt trade even with the rebellious north. Licenses facilitated a rather lively exchange. In addition, the merchants and financiers who remained in, or who had returned to, Antwerp maintained and extended their relations with those family members, commercial partners, and acquaintances who had left, thus building on, and building out, already active networks with other mercantile centers such as Hamburg, Cologne, and Frankfurt, but also with the French ports and the increasingly powerful capitals of London and Paris. Thus, for decades, even generations, after the 1585 disaster, Antwerp remained a "nerve-center . . . of international wholesale commerce" and, perhaps more tellingly, assumed an indispensable role in a burgeoning business transacting bills of exchange (*wisseloperaties*).¹¹ "Assuredly never the equal of Amsterdam, Destiny's new beloved," the city nonetheless filled an "honorable place in the economic organization of Europe."¹²

If Antwerp's economic situation in the early seventeenth century still demonstrated vitality and even possessed a capacity for renewed growth, the end of that century and the succeeding one promised less. Eighteenth-century observers were convinced that Antwerp, and especially its economy, had been dealt debilitating, if not absolutely fatal, blows. Writing toward the end of the eighteenth century, the French traveler, Auguste Pierre Damiens de Gomicourt, discerned decay everywhere. An anonymous Dutch traveler, too, stressed widespread misery: "We found the citizenry very impoverished and swarms of beggars are everywhere." Yet, even in the late eighteenth century, and despite these sober assessments, Antwerp's financial reputation remained very good although the sphere of its activities had contracted. Gomicourt, for all his gloom, noted that Antwerp's bankers enjoyed a "grand crédit," that is, reputation, as well as an enviable ability to command capital throughout Europe. Antwerp men of affairs were known to be "adroit and extremely foresighted," even if "often too timorous in their speculations."¹³ Observers

¹¹ Alfons K. L. Thijs, *Van Geuzenstad tot katholiek bolwerk: Maatschappelijke betekenis van de Kerk in contrareformatorisch Antwerpen* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990), 41, 57; Alfons K. L. Thijs, "Structural Changes in the Antwerp Industry from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century," in Herman van de Wee (ed.), *The Rise and Decline of Urban Industries in Italy and the Low Countries (Late Middle Ages – Early Modern Times)* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 207–12; Houtte, *Onze zeventiende eeuw*; G. Kindt, "De Antwerpse licenthandel met het Noorden van 1615 tot 1630, in het licht van de Spaans-Nederlandse handelspolitiek gedurende de Tachtigjarige Oorlog" (dissertation, Louvain, 1963).

¹² Houtte, "Déclin et survivance d'Anvers," 716, 726.

¹³ Auguste Pierre Damiens de Gomicourt, *Le Voyageur dans les Pays-bas autrichiens, ou lettres sur l'état actuel de ces pays* (Amsterdam: Changuion, 1782–84), 3: 7–9, 77.

in the eighteenth century registered a variety of opinions about Antwerp; some echoed Gomicourt's negativity while others saw a brighter picture where nuggets of plenty glimmered in the darkness. The Italian cleric Giuseppe Garampi, Prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives, found certain "money men" to be "exceptionally rich," and particularly singled out those who helped finance the Emden Company (established 1752) by loaning money to the King of Prussia.¹⁴

As witnesses like Gomicourt attested, the mixed reports of travelers suggested, and scholars have recently emphasized, the city never forfeited its character as a mercantile and financial center,¹⁵ although it remained of lesser importance than the new powerhouses: Amsterdam, Hamburg, London, and Paris. By the early eighteenth century, however, the profits to be reaped from commerce had greatly diminished and a significant percentage of erstwhile merchants withdraw from active commercial life and settled down as rentiers. If active trade declined, banking, however, retained considerable vitality. Major commercial financiers such as the Prolis, the De Prets, and the De Conincks underwrote enormous loans to European governments and courts, engaged in an extensive, rapidly moving, and often dangerous trade in bills of exchange (*wissels*) and gambled in futures. Antwerp, too, was caught up in the speculative frenzy (*windhandel*) of John Law's schemes and its Exchange dove into the financial ventures that bankrupted many reputable banking houses and wealthy individuals, although moralists often exaggerated the size of the catastrophe to score points. After the Spanish Netherlands passed to the Austrian Habsburgs at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, attempts were made to revive Antwerp and Brabant's trade by establishing an Ostend Company (*Oostendse Compagnie*) in 1722. Little long-lasting good came of the venture; it folded in 1731–2. The War of the Austrian Succession bore heavy consequences for Antwerp: the occupation of the city by the French from May 1746 to December 1748 exposed an economic situation "more and more marked by lassitude and financial misery."¹⁶

Nonetheless, some initiatives were launched in the later eighteenth century and a number of family firms and banking houses retained their prominent positions on the European financial stage. When these fell or experienced cash-flow difficulties, however, the effects reverberated well beyond Antwerp. In the end, however, and although the eighteenth century was "not an era of

¹⁴ Quoted in Jan-Albert Goris, *Lof van Antwerpen: Hoe reizigers Antwerpen zagen, van de XVe tot de XXe eeuw* (Brussels: N.V. Standaard-Boekhandel, 1940), 149, 166, 170.

¹⁵ Karel Degryze, "Stadsadel en stadsbestuur te Antwerpen in de 18de eeuw: Een sociaal-economische benadering," *TVG* 93 (1980): 476. Hans Pohl, already in 1972, also suggested that the story of unremitting decline in Antwerp required considerable modification. "Zur Bedeutung Antwerpens als Kreditplatz im beginnenden 17. Jahrhundert," in *Die Stadt in der europäischen Geschichte: Festschrift Edith Ennen*, ed. Werner Besch et al. (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1971), 667–86.

¹⁶ Prims, 9: 15, 20–4, 28. Guillaume Beetemé, *Anvers: Métropole du commerce et des arts* (2 vols.; Louvain: Lefever, 1887–8), 1: 197–201.

commercial prosperity,” bankers and traders in the city continued to do fairly well; some spectacularly so. Diversification of investments, as well as the more general money trade, generated and sustained fortunes, although these often held within themselves the seeds of disaster.

The life of the financier and banker, Charles Proli (1723–86), exemplifies well the dynamic if ultimately treacherous side to Antwerp’s business life in the mid to late eighteenth century. His father and two Antwerp colleagues, Jacques de Pret and Louis François de Coninck, were three original directors of the Ostend Company. Charles’s wealth and position in the late eighteenth century depended on his ability to move with the times, and seek out and exploit the most profitable investment opportunities. This flexibility, or slipperiness, as some would have it, constituted an essential business virtue in the rapidly shifting economic climate of the eighteenth century and, especially, its later decades. Like his counterparts in Amsterdam and Hamburg, Charles placed his capital and that of his investors successively, and often successfully, in banking, international commerce, sugar refining, real estate, and the colonial trade.¹⁷ Still this string of splendid accomplishments ended bitterly (and is discussed more fully in [Chapter 5](#)). In 1785, Charles Proli, “regarded as a most knowledgeable man in the commerce of the Indies and as the principal support of the Asiatic Company,” went bankrupt when the Imperial Asiatic Company of Trieste failed. His losses were vast; his bankruptcy an urban disaster with international consequences.¹⁸ The impact of the Proli collapse sent tsunami-like shock waves rippling throughout northern Europe, which struck other trade centers hard.

Amsterdam has often been portrayed as the immediate and logical successor to Antwerp, economically cannibalizing Antwerp’s corpse. Scholars have frequently interpreted the reasons for Amsterdam’s seemingly miraculous economic growth as deriving from international trade. That interpretation has, however, undergone significant revision in recent decades. No doubt exists that international and colonial trade, especially that of the Dutch India companies (the Dutch East India Company [VOC], established in 1602, and the Dutch West India Company [WIC], established in 1621), were potent economic forces and there is no denying the dramatic expansion those trades experienced in the seventeenth century. Late twentieth-century economic historians

¹⁷ Isacker and Uyten, *Antwerp*, 169, 236; Jan Parmentier, *Oostende & Co.: Het verhaal van de Zuid-Nederlandse Oost-Indiëvaart 1715–1735* (Gent: Ludion, 2002); Daan Wybaillie, “Het aandeelhouderschap van de Oostendse Compagnie,” (Licentiaat, Free University of Brussels, 2004); Michael-W. Serruys, “Oostend en de General Indische Compagnie: De opbloei en neergang van een koloniale handelshaven (1713–1740),” *Tijdschrift voor zeegechiedenis* 24 (2005): 43–59.

¹⁸ On the Proli family and its bankruptcy, see Helma Houtman-De Smedt, *Charles Proli, Antwerps zakenman en bankier, 1723–1786: Een biografische en bedrijfshistorische studie* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1983); Jan Denuncé, *Charles de Proli en de Aziatische Compagnie met inventaris van de Proli’s nalatenschap* (Antwerp: Jos. Guillaume, 1932).

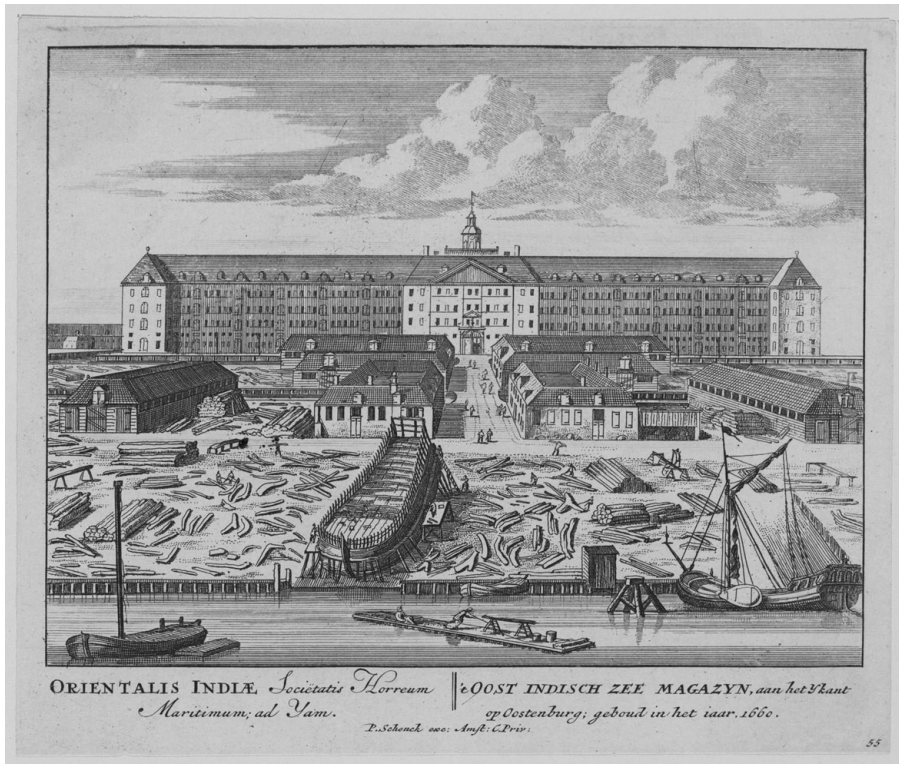


FIGURE 1 Warehouse of the East India Company

have, however, repeatedly emphasized that the heart and soul of seventeenth-century commerce, at the high point of Dutch prosperity and economic influence, rested solidly on endogenous factors, that is, on “supply and demand within the Republic itself and on international transit commerce.” The mother trade with the Baltic remained critical as well. Likewise, recent historiography has also rejected the idea that Amsterdam’s rise was predicated on Antwerp’s fall, although the jury still seems to be out on how alike or different the two economies were in their respective periods of “flowering.”¹⁹ For our purposes here, it is, however, important to realize that both became, and remained, as Hamburg did somewhat later, major mercantile and financial centers.

Curiously, despite continued vitality, contemporaries here, too, composed a story of decline that they usually attributed to grave moral and political flaws and generations of Dutch nationalists and historians have been content to follow that scripting. Reality was more complex and interesting. Once Antwerp

¹⁹ De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*; Lesger, “Vertraagde groei,” 25–7; Lesger, *Rise*, 13 reviews the relevant literature.

no longer formed the single dominant economic center in Europe,²⁰ several commercial cities competed for dominance. It was a struggle that Amsterdam won and a victory that the city on the Amstel preserved until the 1650s or even the 1670s. Still, Amsterdam was not Antwerp and as Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude have observed, “an essential difference separated the two: Antwerp had united European commerce as a meeting point of merchants from north and south; Amsterdam united European commerce by going out and knitting it together.”²¹

The general outlines of Amsterdam’s prosperity, and the timing of its rise and decline, can be quickly summarized although they continue to generate debate among historians. During the Golden Age, the growth of the Dutch economy, and that of Amsterdam especially, was literally explosive and Amsterdam became in these years, in Fernand Braudel’s colorful phrasing, “the rendezvous of riches” and “the darling of the gods.” Whatever the reason, “the celebrated AMSTERDAM” evolved into “one of the greatest and most notable mercantile cities on the globe.”²² The profits drawn from trade, combined with a growing sophistication in financial institutions that multiplied the uses of money and that worked for the convenience of merchants – the establishment of the Bank of Amsterdam (*Wisselbank*) in 1609, the opening of the Exchange (*Beurs*) seven years earlier, the development of a competent and expansive system of notaries, and the gradual evolution of a consular service – moored this prosperity. In addition, the Dutch moved in the vanguard of initiatives to manage risk through the establishment of insurance and shipping partnerships. The wealth of Amsterdam rested on the availability of increased capital drawn not only from wealthy refugees from the southern Netherlands (or elsewhere, such as the Sephardic Jews from the Iberian peninsula), but also from the stability and strength of the domestic market for a wide range of goods. A commercial crisis that affected all European countries in 1618–21 slowed the rate of growth and thereafter the Dutch found themselves competing with other rivals, in particular, the French, English, and Spanish. Still, the economy did well and not until the last quarter of the seventeenth century did greater concern about the permanence of that prosperity arise.²³

If the seventeenth century was frequently represented to generations of Antwerpeners as “our unlucky century,” the eighteenth century assumes much the same role in the history of Amsterdam and the Dutch Republic as a whole. Whether stagnation, decline, relative stability, or even innovation characterized the period is complicated and has occasioned much scholarly dissension.

²⁰ There is considerable debate among economic historians if either Antwerp or Amsterdam formed a single center or a staple market. See Lesger, *Rise*, 1–61.

²¹ De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 407–8, 667. Clé Lesger has questioned this interpretation and suggests another model stressing the development of Amsterdam as the pre-eminent “information exchange.” *Rise*, 1–13, 258–63.

²² Tirion, 5: 3. ²³ De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 669–73; Israel, 307–27, 610–36.

Jonathan Israel paints a basically pessimistic portrait; he employs words like “crumbling,” “collapse,” and “decay.” De Vries and Van der Woude advance an entirely different perspective. While admitting that the last two and a half decades of the seventeenth century “almost certainly brought absolute decline to the total output of the Dutch economy,” they view the very same years as plenteous in initiatives. To avoid what these authors refer to as “the tightening mercantilistic noose,” the Dutch, with the Amsterdammers at the fore, embarked on new, high-risk ventures that produced some quite beneficial results.²⁴ No matter how one slices it, Amsterdam remained in the eighteenth century a city that contemporaries perceived as fabulously wealthy.

During the Golden Age, the importance of overseas trade and financing had already become evident and, in the eighteenth century, finance and the trade in colonial goods became the most dynamic sectors of the economy, a dynamism especially marked in Amsterdam where an increasingly narrow group of elites benefited from the elaboration of this new fiscal-financial complex. Dutch banking houses famous throughout Europe, such as the Hopes, the Pels, Clifford & Sons, De Neufville & Company, Deppenwolde, Dedel, Vry-Temminck, and Ter Bosch, all based in Amsterdam, built and directed immense financial empires.²⁵ At the same time, new commercial and financial rivals competed with Amsterdam and the Dutch Republic: London and Hamburg.²⁶ After 1780, a series of factors combined to generate a major crisis that destroyed the “old” Republic. Urban stagnation or even outright decline, a return to agriculture, and growing social problems especially in the form of extensive pauperization, darkened the decades between 1780 and the close of the Napoleonic period. Even the commercial and financial sectors that had remained vigorous throughout the eighteenth century were finally undermined by a series of crises that often appeared in the form of business defaults, speculative crashes, and the shattering bankruptcies of major houses and firms.

On the surface, Hamburg’s economic trajectory and the bases of its wealth and prosperity strongly resembled those of Amsterdam and Antwerp: all were major ports; all were transshipping and trading centers; and all became financial nexi that brokered massive amounts of credit. Over the course of the seventeenth century, while Antwerp’s economy declined in overall European and international significance and as Amsterdam rose to the top of the economic heap, the groundwork for later greatness was being laid in Hamburg. Here, too, economic power derived largely from commerce. As early as the

²⁴ See Israel, 998–1005; De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 1–5, 677–9; Lesger, *Rise*, 1–13.

²⁵ See, for instance, Marten G. Buist, *At spes non fracta: Hope & Co. 1770–1815: Merchant Bankers and Diplomats at Work* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974); Jan Willem Veluwenkamp, *Ondernemersgedrag op de Hollandse stapelmarkt in de tijd van de Republiek: De Amsterdamse Handelsfirma Jan de Isaac de Neufville & Comp., 1730–1764* (Meppel: Krips Repro., 1981); Ernst Baasch, *Holländische Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1927).

²⁶ De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 681–2; Israel, 998–1018.

sixteenth century, Hamburg had gained a reputation as the “florentissimum Emporium totius Germaniae” that rested to a goodly degree on its exchanges with the Low Countries. Like other northern European cities, Hamburg gained from the decline of Antwerp and an influx of southern Netherlanders. Hamburg’s government provided ways for these to settle under favorable economic conditions and the Lutherans among them (the only ones entitled to full, politically enfranchised citizenship) rapidly achieved key positions in government and prominence in the economy as well. The situation for Calvinists, Jews, and Mennonites remained less favorable.²⁷ Germany’s first stock exchange was established in Hamburg in 1558 on the Antwerp model and the Hamburg Bank, set up in 1619, drew on Dutch precedents. Hamburg’s bank allowed the city to avoid much of the widespread monetary devaluation and inflation that struck northern Europe during the first quarter of the seventeenth century. That so-called “Teeter-Totter Time,” involving an extensive monetary debasement, reached its high point in 1621–3 and caused serious economic difficulties for many mercantile centers. Critical, too, was the creation in 1665 of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce (*Commerzdeputation*).²⁸

While Amsterdam’s economy thrust ahead in the first half of the seventeenth century, Hamburg simultaneously began its slower ascent to the economic heights. Already, by the last third of the sixteenth century, Hamburg’s trade had augmented perceptibly in scope and scale, partly because Hamburg started to distance itself from older Hanseatic practices, traditions, and alliances. In 1611, the city became the staple for the Merchant Adventurers, who had earlier moved from Antwerp to Emden and then to Middelburg. They remained in Hamburg until 1806 allowing the city to collect a rich harvest in import duties.

²⁷ Erik Lindberg, in comparing the economies of Hamburg and Lübeck in the seventeenth century, argues that Hamburg “developed unique commercial institutions that laid the foundation for the city’s subsequent growth by protecting the property rights of foreign and local merchants alike.” “Rise,” 641–62, 662 (quote). Lindberg overstates the case for Hamburg’s toleration and probably succumbs a bit to the myth propagated by generations of Hamburg boosters and historians. Joachim Whaley astutely observes that the story of Hamburg as welcoming all foreigners and thus fostering its prosperity by an open-arms policy is supported by no real evidence although “it reflects the views of a long line of Hamburg historians beginning around 1800 and culminating in the better-known work of Percy Schramm.” *Religious Toleration*, 8, 11. See also Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 16–26 and *passim*. Compare the situation of Jews and Muslims in Marseilles; Junko Thérèse Takeda, *Between Crown & Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 97–104.

²⁸ Konrad Schneider, “Hamburg während der Kipper- und Wipperzeit,” *ZVHG* 67 (1981): 47–74. The Teeter-Totter incident, like the Law one a century later, excited vast public commentary. See, for instance, Gustav Freitag, “Die Kipper und Wipper und die öffentliche Meinung,” in Gustav Freitag, *Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit*, vol. 2: *Reformationszeit und Dreißigjähriger Krieg* (Munich: Gütersloh, 1998), 299–318; Ulrich Rosseaux, *Die Kipper und Wipper als publizistisches Ereignis (1620–1626): Eine Studie zu den Strukturen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Zeitalter des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001).

In the 1590s, Hamburg merchants started probing into the Mediterranean and initiated trade along the Italian coast. In the decades preceding the Thirty Years War, commerce with Holland probably still dominated Hamburg's economic relationships, but of growing importance was the Iberian peninsula. After the Thirty Years War, when the Barbary pirates made the Mediterranean an unhealthy destination for merchants, Hamburg sought out new partnerships, especially with Russia, but also, and of increasing moment, with France. At the same time, Hamburg, like Amsterdam, was becoming a communication and information center; a function that would grow throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and further stimulate the ability to generate wealth.²⁹ Likewise, Hamburg was rapidly developing into a major financial center with strapping merchant banking houses, such as that of John Parish and Voght & Sieveking. These companies, while never as large or powerful as the Hopes or the Neufvilles in Amsterdam, nonetheless attained European stature.

By the eighteenth century, then, Hamburg had become firmly locked into an emerging global trading network and, like Amsterdam, had also achieved the position of a financial center. Of course, like all entities involved in what was becoming worldwide trade, Hamburg, too, suffered cycles of economic boom and bust. Periods of aggressive expansion and previously undreamed-of prosperity alternated with stagnation or even contraction. Some merchants, it is true, shied away from chancy but possibly lucrative ventures and hoarded their resources. Still, as in Amsterdam and Antwerp, crises called forth innovative energies and often encouraged rather than discouraged risk-taking.

The fortunes of Hamburg mirrored the fortunes of other trading nations in these years and Hamburg experienced similar problems roughly at the same moments as Amsterdam and Antwerp; all suffered related cascades of major bankruptcies in the period immediately following the Seven Years War, and then again in the crises of 1771–3 and 1783 where major houses in all three failed.³⁰ The eighteenth century was, therefore, something of a joint roller-coaster ride. The recessions of 1720 and 1793 proved brief in Hamburg and the economy quickly rebounded. The crises of 1763 and then 1799 marked the advent of more serious economic setbacks from which it required considerable time to recover. Inflation haunted the last quarter of the century and concern over what contemporaries branded “malicious bankruptcies” and

²⁹ *Hamburg*, 229–33, 247–52, 328–34; Martin Reißmann, *Die hamburgische Kaufmannschaft des 17. Jahrhunderts in sozialgeschichtlicher Sicht* (Hamburg: Christians, 1975); Ernst Baasch, “Hamburgs Seeschiffahrt und Waarenhandel vom Ende des 16. bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts,” *ZVHG* 9 (1894): 295–420; Ernst Baasch, *Die Handelskammer zu Hamburg 1665–1915*, vol. 1: 1665–1814 (Hamburg: Gräfe & Sillem, 1915), 16–117; Hermann Kellenbenz, *Unternehmerkräfte Hamburger Portugal- und Spanienhandel, 1590–1625* (Hamburg: Hamburgische Bücherei, 1954).

³⁰ Stephan Skalweit, *Der Berliner Wirtschaftskrise von 1763 und ihre Hintergründe* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1937).

"conscienceless speculations" grew throughout the last half of the century as well.³¹ In the 1770s and 1780s, and after recovering from the 1763 downturn, commerce flourished. By the 1790s, Hamburg surfed the crest of an unprecedented economic wave that was nevertheless marred by periodic economic reversals. Several events had propelled Hamburg into the economic limelight. The central ones involved the gradual weakening of the Dutch as commercial rivals and the seepage of investments from Amsterdam to Hamburg. An advantageous trade agreement with the French concluded in 1769, the almost insatiable European hunger for colonial products, and England's need for grain importations from eastern Europe, caused the city's so-evident economic rise in the 1770s. After 1783, Hamburg began to forge valuable links with the infant American republic and, at first, only profited from the turmoil of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. All this came to a screeching halt in 1799 and virtually died with the city's incorporation into the French Empire as a *bonne ville* and part of the Continental System.³²

None of these three cities experienced uninterrupted prosperity; in none was decline inevitable or constant; in none did merchants and governors lack initiatives or an ability to retrench and innovate. Some economic problems characterized all and similarly affected urban politics and political cultures. Of course, comparable experiences and concerns could foster extremely varied or even contrasting discussions about politics and economics and provoke actions of very different sorts that reified those ideas. In no city, however, were men and women reducible to economic animals; they were at once citizens, governors, Christians, family-fathers, social beings, and moral watchdogs as well as *homini oeconomici*. Thus, as forcefully as economics shaped political life in the merchant republics, other factors played equal, and oftentimes greater, roles. Morality, or rather a sense of propriety and of what behavioral standards should be especially in the realm of business, was one.

³¹ Mary Lindemann, "The Anxious Merchant, the Bold Speculator, and the Malicious Bankrupt: Doing Business in Eighteenth-Century Hamburg," in Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (eds.), *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 161–82.

³² *Hamburg*, 374–8; Franklin Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte der Aufklärung in Hamburg und Altona* (2nd expanded edn.; Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1990), 178–85; Helen Liebel, "Laissez-faire vs. Mercantilism: The Rise of Hamburg and the Hamburg Bourgeoisie vs. Frederick the Great in the Crisis of 1763," *VSWG* 52 (1965): 207–38; Fred-Conrad Huhn, "Die Handelsbeziehungen zwischen Frankreich und Hamburg im 18. Jahrhundert unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Handelsverträge von 1716 und 1769," (dissertation, Hamburg, 1952). On Hamburg during the French occupation and the Continental System, see several works by Silvia Marzagalli, especially *Les boulevards de la fraude: Le négoce maritime et le blocus continental, 1806–1813*, Bordeaux, Hamburg, Livorno (Vileneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1999) and "Port Cities in the French Wars: The Responses of Merchants in Bordeaux, Hamburg and Livorno to Napoleon's Continental Blockade, 1806–1813," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord* 6, 4 (October 1996): 65–73.

Religion

Another major factor was religion which repeatedly inserted itself into politics. Although a *leitmotif*, it never played solo. Indeed, and to extend the musical metaphor, it usually appeared as a counterpunctual intonation. Religion and religious squabbles sometimes exited the civic stage altogether, briefly walked on, or hid behind the scenes to emerge with a suddenness that startled audiences and players alike. Because religion and politics were tightly entwined, however, the moments and issues of religious perturbations in all three cities could not help but shape political culture or fail to color it.

It is still often, and with a lamentable lack of reflection, assumed that after the Peace of Westphalia (1648) religion disappeared as a disturbing factor from the political, diplomatic, and military life of Europe. This is assuredly not true. The most recent comprehensive study of the Thirty Years War notes that religious conflicts or disturbances by no means vanished. If the war “changed imperial political culture . . . [so that] theologians no longer influenced policy,” religion continued to cause, complicate, or exacerbate strife within polities and between them. If the most pronounced religious violence had settled, agitation continued and rose up with special fury in the political and constitutional wars fought in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The ferocity of the battle between the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants (respectively, the more moderate and the more conservative Calvinists) in the early seventeenth-century Dutch Republic may have died down, but its effects and the political impact of religion had hardly dissipated, as the furor over Balthasar Bekker’s *The Enchanted World* (*De betoverde Weereld*, 1691), one of the central publications of the early Enlightenment, demonstrates. In arguing that “the Devil, demons, and angels [were but] figments of the superstitious imagination” Becker ignited a firestorm that flamed across northwestern Europe. Calvinist fundamentalism revived in the mid seventeenth century with the quarrel between Gisbertus Voetius (a fundamentalist Calvinist) and Johannes Cocceius (a more moderate Calvinist). This theological strife, as well as the earlier one, quickly sounded political notes: “Orangists and Voetians were natural allies; for both were endeavouring to check the political dominance – with its confessional implications – of the States of Holland” and, by extension, cities like Amsterdam. The influence of these confrontations continued throughout the eighteenth century and assumed a not insignificant role in the Patriot Revolution of 1780–7.³³

³³ Israel, 660–9 (quote 664), 925–6, 1107; Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 375–91; Rudolf Barteld Evenhuis, *Ook dat was Amsterdam* (5 vols.; Amsterdam: W. ten Have, 1965–6), 3: 253–305; Annemarie Nooijen, “Unserm grossen Bekker ein Denkmal”? Balthasar Bekkers “*Betoverde Weereld*” in den deutschen Landen zwischen Orthodoxie und Aufklärung (Münster: Waxmann, 2009). The religious positions were, of course, far more complicated than this short description suggests.

In Hamburg, too, a theological debate, a “priests’ quarrel,” over “dangerous Spenerian beliefs,” that is, Pietism, entwined with the civic controversies of the mid to late seventeenth century. Throughout the eighteenth century, questions of toleration for specific religious groups – including Catholics – repeatedly roiled political life. Opposition could explode into violence as the destruction of the Catholic chapel of the Imperial Resident in 1719 demonstrated.³⁴

In all three cities the issue of tolerance for religious minorities, and especially Jews, Anabaptists, and Mennonites, inflamed passions and shaped political culture as well as resonating strongly in economic life. Over the course of time, both Amsterdam and Hamburg gained a reputation of being tolerant oases in seas of prejudice and religious bigotry. Older historiography on Amsterdam was clear: Amsterdam’s tolerant religious stance attracted those persecuted elsewhere and contributed mightily to its economic puissance. Hamburg has likewise basked in the glow of a similar reputation for religious tolerance that scholars have associated with *its* economic prosperity. No lesser historian than Peter Gay in his classic work on the Enlightenment praised the city on the Elbe: “Hamburg . . . avoided the decay of most of the others [Free Imperial cities] by welcoming foreigners of all nationalities and giving them a place in civic and commercial affairs.” He likewise admired Hamburg’s constitution of 1712 as “perhaps the least oligarchical urban charter of the age” imbued with what he considered a “liberal spirit.”³⁵ Some Hamburg contemporaries, as we shall see, expressed far less conviction and enthusiasm.

Neither Amsterdam nor Hamburg can for the times be considered especially intolerant of newcomers and religious minorities; but the actual dimensions of sufferance are often hyperbolized and the related idea that such tolerance was *the* basis of economic prosperity and *the* bringer of civic peace are less defensible positions. Recent historiography, for instance, has greatly complicated the discussion of toleration in both cities, emphasizing its ambiguities, peculiarities, and frequent blind spots.³⁶ Moreover, if Amsterdam and Hamburg have enjoyed a sterling reputation for tolerance, Antwerp has suffered

³⁴ Whaley, *Religious Toleration*; Driedger, *Obedient*.

³⁵ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 2: *The Science of Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1966–9), 47–8. See also Lindberg, *Rise*.

³⁶ For Hamburg, see Whaley, *Religious Toleration*. There is much work on questions of toleration in the Dutch Republic. See, for example, Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 201–21; Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia and Henk F. K. van Nierop (eds.), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Judith Pollmann, *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); and Charles H. Parker, *Faith on the Margins: Catholics and Catholicism in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Frederik A. van Lieburg, *De Nadere Reformatie in Utrecht tot tijd van Voetius* (Rotterdam: Lindenberg, 1989), 13–44.

from the opposite: a reputation for intolerance, dating back to the days of the Dutch Revolt, and deriving from “l’intolérance de Philippe II.” Certainly, Philip II cannot take all the blame but the Revolt of the Netherlands that began in 1562 did greatly modify the city’s religious make-up. Before about 1550, a heteroglot mix of evangelicals lived in the city: Calvinists, Anabaptists, and Lutherans. Gradually, however, between 1550 and 1577, efforts were made to extirpate Protestantism. In the Wonder Year (from April 1566 to April 1567) Calvinism resurged, only to be suppressed bloodily by the Duke of Alba. To the extent that this persecution neither destroyed nor dispersed these various Protestant groups, they were driven underground.³⁷

If newer scholarship has substantially modified the picture of a tolerant Amsterdam and Hamburg in the eighteenth century, less work has been done for the same period on Antwerp. What there is suggests that Antwerp was by no means as fanatical in its attitude toward non-Catholics and foreigners as often suggested. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, a number of Jews were citizens even though this contravened the Catholic prerequisite for citizenship. Abraham Arons, for instance, had been a citizen at least since 1728 and remained so until 1758 when his citizenship was revoked. It has been argued that precisely concern over commerce prompted the decision to extend citizenship to Jews.³⁸ Joseph II’s later attempts to introduce more broadminded religious policies in the southern Netherlands in the 1780s met considerable local resistance because many Antwerpeners perceived them as thinly veiled attacks on cloisters and their property.³⁹

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century people rarely separated religion or confessional issues from other critical influences; neither should we. The case of the Dutch lawyer, Nicolaas Muys van Holy, demonstrates how motives layered upon one another. Muys was a political pamphleteer in the late 1680–90s and early 1700s. He raged in print against deleterious speculations in stocks, against the selling of East India shares altogether, against the diversion of testamentary funds intended for charity, and against Bekker’s “heresies.” A sharp critic of political and economic life, his strongly held religious and moral sentiments also informed his protests and must have determined to a goodly degree his republican, anti-Orangist stance in the 1690s as he turned his pen against Willem III.⁴⁰

³⁷ Marnef, *Antwerp*. Guido Marnef is currently completing a study of the Calvinist Republic.

³⁸ Prims, 9: 24, 26, 56.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9: 72–3; Derek Beales, *Joseph II, vol. 2: Against the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 271–332 on the Josephine reforms.

⁴⁰ Evenhuis, 3: 288–9; 4: 245–7; on Muys’s attack on Bekker, Knuttel, 13886–7; M. Roest, “Nicolaas Muys van Holy,” *De Navorscher* 7 (1857): 18–22, 81–5, 150–5, 239–47. Muys’s fight with the Lutheran community involved the misuse of the estate of Jan Geerkens by his widow and her second husband. See *Brieven van Mr. Nicolaes Muys van Holy, Advt. aan Diakonen, Kerkmeesteren, en Regenten van het Weeshuis der Luterse gemeente binnen Amsterdam: De tweede Druk* (Amsterdam: J. Crellius, 1706 [first published in 1705]), Knuttel

Government structures

Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg all fit the early modern definition of a republic. While all three cities retained much (if not absolute) control over their internal fortunes, they nonetheless differed in significant ways. Critically, each city existed in a dissimilar relationship with the larger political entities that encased it or to which it was tied. In the Netherlands, with the Treaty of Utrecht (1579), Amsterdam became the most powerful of the voting cities in the Dutch Republic. The city governed itself within a larger decentralized political system. It existed in an often tense relationship with the *stadhouders* (stewards or governors)⁴¹ and had sometimes equally fraught dealings with the other members of the Republic. Moreover, European-wide wars frequently drew in the Republic and, perforce, Amsterdam. As Spanish power waned, France became the chief opponent especially once Willem III assumed the English throne with his wife, Mary Stuart. Thus, politics *within* Amsterdam always imbricated itself with the larger political issues that involved the Republic, the stadhouder-prince, and other European states. The high tide of that involvement fell in the period after 1672. When Willem III died in 1702, the Republic's political position and its military and diplomatic impact had substantially declined. Its ranking as a major European power ended in the ignominy of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–4) that was for the Republic, as Jonathan Israel has observed, an “unmitigated disaster.”⁴²

15540 and *Brief van Mr. Nicolaes Muys van Holy, advt. aan... Mr. Johan van den Broek, der beiden Rechten Doctor en Professor; als mede Secretaris van Kerk- en Weesmeestern, mitsgaders van Diakonen der Luitense Gemeente tot Amsterdam* (21 December 1705). *Mit den noodige Bijlagen* (Amsterdam: door den Auteur uitgegeven, 1706), Knuttel 15541. On Bekker, Nicolaas Muys van Holy, *Overweging van het Hooftpoint in Do. Bekkers Boek, genaemt de Betoverde Weereld, Te weten, of de Duyvel op een Mensch werken kan* (Amsterdam: Pieter Rotterdam, 1692), Knuttel 13886 + enlarged and reissued Knuttel 13887. Against Willem III, *Spiegel der Waarheyd, Ofte t'Samensprekinge tusschen Een Armiaan ende Vroom Patriot, Waar inne krachtig vertoont ende bewesen word, dat door de quade directie ende toeleg van eenige Heerschende Regenten Tot Amsterdam, Ons Land in den voorgaanden, en desen Oorlog Is ingewickelt met Vrankryk* (1690) [usually assigned to Ericus Walten] Knuttel 13480 (also 13481). On sale of stocks and economic “morality,” see his *Middelen en motiven om het kopen en verkopen van Oost- en West-Indische actien, die niet getransporteert werden, mitsgaders ook die de verkoper ten dage van den verkoop niet in eigendom heeft, als mede optie partyen der actien, te beswaren met een Impost ten behoeve van het gemeene Land en de stad Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1687), Knuttel 12622.

⁴¹ The position of stadtholder – Dutch: *stadhouder* – is not comparable to that of prince or king. It originally meant something like “place-holder” or representative. In the Netherlands, the medieval function of stadhouder became in the early modern period, from sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, something like a de facto head of government. Only one early modern stadhouder, Willem IV, was stadhouder in all provinces at once as a hereditary *Stadhouder-Generaal* (from 1747 until his death in 1751). For several long periods of time there was, for instance, no stadhouder in the province of Holland, thus creating two “stadhouderless” periods, from 1650 to 1672 and then from 1702 to 1747.

⁴² Israel, 1097; Frijhoff/Prak-2, 152–3, 207–10.

Antwerp's political fortune, like its economic one, rose and fell with often dizzying speed. "For almost one hundred years, from the late fifteenth century to about 1585, Antwerp was the undisputed commercial metropolis of the Western World."⁴³ This commercial clout endowed it with great political significance even if its military power remained limited. With the siege and fall of Antwerp in 1584–5 and the subsequent severing of the Spanish Netherlands from the north, Antwerp lost much of its population and forfeited its economic importance; it also signaled the moment when Antwerp descended into virtual insignificance politically.⁴⁴ The Treaty of Münster in 1648 affirmed the de facto situation closing the Scheldt. Governors (*landvoogde*) appointed by the Spanish crown henceforth ruled the southern Netherlands.

Older historiography has generally viewed this development as effectively integrating Antwerp into a centralized state.⁴⁵ In point of fact, however, centralization remained weak and attempts to exert tighter control sporadic. In the wake of the tumult when the government in Brussels reassigned the postal services to the Taxis family in 1658–9, the central government tried to grip urban events more firmly and rein in the power of the more representative element in city government – the Broad Council – with the promulgation of a Political Regulation in 1659 that substantially reduced the Council's role. Despite this, internal urban political bodies and the Estates of the provinces retained significant power, as did burgomasters and magistrates in the cities.⁴⁶ Not until after the Peace of Utrecht (1713), did more sustained efforts to centralize authority occur. These initiatives centered on curbing and recasting the powers urban councils possessed. Thus, in the early eighteenth century, the Austrian governors viewed the "independence" of the municipal councils as an "abuse." This confrontation, however, took place not only in Antwerp. The fight revolved around the constitutional power of the Broad Councils in several cities.⁴⁷ The

⁴³ Donald J. Harreld, *High Germans in the Low Countries: German Merchants and Commerce in Golden Age Antwerp* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 2.

⁴⁴ Marnef, *Antwerp*, xi–xiv; Israel, 216–19.

⁴⁵ According to Floris Prims, for instance, Antwerp underwent a transition from a "democracy" and a "republic" based on principles of independence, with its own justice system (albeit in "consultation" with central government) to a "subordinate, administrative entity in the duchy." He went on to argue that during the Governor-Generalship of the Archduke Albrecht and Archduchess Isabella during 1596–1621 "the centralization process proceeded apace and the independence [of the city] was more and more restricted," to the extent that one could almost no longer speak of a "political history" of Antwerp in those years. Prims, 8, part 1: 248–9.

⁴⁶ Wolfgang Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis: Die Geschichte ihrer Post und ihrer Unternehmen* (Munich: Piper, 1990). The text of the "Reglement Polityck" in *Reglement van den 17. October 1654. Reglement polityck, raekende de stadt Antwerpen, in dato drye-en-twingsten October, seshthien hondert ende negen-en-vyftig. Reglement van den 8. April 1711, Reglement van den 24. November 1752* (Antwerp: n.p. 1765); Prims, 6A: 161; Houtte, *Onze zeventiende eeuw*, 22.

⁴⁷ Prims, 9, part 1: 8–9.

conflict assumed other, shriller tones once Joseph II succeeded his mother, the Empress Maria-Theresa, and attempted to enact a series of reforms uniform throughout his lands.⁴⁸ In sum, neither the Spanish nor the Austrian Habsburgs energetically pursued programs of centralization in the southern Netherlands at least until the early eighteenth century and then only with limited success. Unlike Amsterdam and Hamburg, however, Antwerp was always immediately subordinate to a central power whose ability to effect changes was substantial, if often circumscribed and thwarted by the assertion of traditional civic privileges and liberties. The quite real presence of an external power and the press of international events, however, weighed far more heavily on Antwerp than Amsterdam or Hamburg.

Amsterdam also had to deal with the larger political entity of which it formed a part and whose fate it helped determine. Several stadhouders sought to exert tighter control over Amsterdam and often managed to change the magistracy's composition by sweeping one group, particularly powerful individual, or family clique out and whisking another in (*wetverzetten*). Especially strong, ambitious, or energetic stadhouders such as Willem II and Willem III could powerfully affect internal politics and create, or exploit, factions.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the magistracy itself in Amsterdam decided what happened administratively and governmentally by making laws, distributing justice, raising and collecting taxes, ordering commerce, and keeping the peace all to a large extent free from outside intervention.

Hamburg's situation presented another variation. Here, too, nearby powers, including Denmark, Sweden, Hanover, Celle-Lüneburg, and Prussia interfered, or tried to interfere, in internal affairs. Additionally, men engaged in internal squabbles frequently sought protection or assistance from Hamburg's neighbors. The much studied Jastram-Snitger affair of 1686 provides one illustrative example. Faced with rising opposition from inside the city and worried about threats from outside powers, Jastram and Snitger, the two leaders of the rebellious popular party, solicited Danish aid. Their bitter opponent, the suspended Bürgermeister Heinrich Meurer, fled to the Guelph court at Celle and sought protection and assistance there.⁵⁰ Despite a decision of the Imperial Cameral Tribunal (*Reichskammergericht*) in 1618 affirming Hamburg's status as an imperial free city, disputes over sovereignty ran throughout the sixteenth and

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 72–3. ⁴⁹ Israel, 595–609, 807–25.

⁵⁰ A large scholarly literature on the Jastram-Snitger revolt explores these issues in great detail. Hans-Dieter Loose, "Die Jastram-Snitger Wirren in der zeitgenössischen Geschichtsschreibung," *ZVHG* 53 (1967): 1–20; Heinrich Erdmann, *Hamburg vor 200 Jahren oder die Jastram-Snitger'schen Wirren: (1674–1686)* (Hamburg: Epstein & Engelke, 1886); Christian Friedrich Wurm, "Der europäische Hintergrund der Snitger-Jastram'schen Wirren in Hamburg 1686: Aus archivalischen Quellen," *Hamburgisches Akademisches und Real-Gymnasium: Verzeichniss der Vorlesungen* (Hamburg, 1855): 1–42.

seventeenth centuries.⁵¹ After concluding the Gottorper Agreement of 1768, the Danish Crown recognized Hamburg as a Free Imperial City directly responsible only to the Holy Roman Empire. By then, most European polities had come to accept Hamburg as an independent “city-state” (*Stadtstaat*).

Hamburg’s relationship with the Holy Roman Empire was sometimes a rocky one. The imperial incubator, however, also effectively safeguarded Hamburg’s independence. The city was far too important, strategically as well as economically, to allow it to fall under the control of other powers. Hamburg’s ties to the Empire depended on two things: the Empire’s and Europe’s complementary recognition of the city’s independence and its right to self-governance. While the Empire and, at times, others, such as Brandenburg-Prussia or Hanover, served to shield the city from the designs of predator states, the Empire could also intervene in internal political matters. Over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the emperor repeatedly empowered commissions to mediate disputes that had arisen between the citizenry, represented ensemble in the *Bürgerschaft*, and the Senate or city council. Especially in the 1680s and 1690s, many in Hamburg regarded such mediation as part of a plot cooked up between the governing elites (those sitting in the Senate) and the Empire to repress the demands of the citizenry, and as embodying a thinly disguised attack on Hamburg’s freedom.⁵² While the bonds of self-interest existing between the Empire and Hamburg never snapped, other powers, in particular Prussia after the Seven Years War, began to assume greater import to the city politically as well as economically. A general if by no means totally untroubled civic tranquility that prevailed after the promulgation of a new constitution, the Principal Recess (*Hauptrezeß*) in 1712, itself brokered by an imperial commission, offered no cause for further imperial interventions.

Likewise critical was Hamburg’s neutrality, a neutrality that its mercantile and political elites took great pains to preserve. Hamburg was never a military power. Its civic militia and garrison of soldiers remained unimpressive forces and Hamburg never (at least before the Napoleonic Wars) sent troops beyond

⁵¹ Rainer Ramcke, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Hamburg und Österreich im 18. Jahrhundert: Kaiserlich-reichsstädtisches Verhältnis im Zeichen von Handels- und Finanzinteressen* (Hamburg: Hans Christians, 1969), 3.

⁵² *Hamburg*, 269–87; Gisela Rückleben, “Rat und Bürgerschaft in Hamburg 1595–1686: Innere Bindungen und Gegensätze” (Ph.D. dissertation Marburg/Lahn, 1969). Point III of “Die So wohl in gemeinen Kayserliche/ als ihren absonderlichen Statuten und Recessen-mäßigen Rechten umümbstößlich geegeründete Hamburgische Bürgerliche Freyheit Oder Gründliches MANIFEST und Darthuung/... Der gantzen Welt Zur unbetrüglichen Nachricht Ans Licht gegeben/ Von einem Der Ergessen Hamburgis. Bürgerschaft Aufrichtig zugethanem Stadt-Kinde. Gedruckt/ im August Monat 1699,” unpaginated pamphlet in StAHbg, Bibliothek, A320/24a expressly refers to the “Stadt-Feinde” (i.e. members of Senate) who “ad Falsa Narrata” arranged to have the Empire dispatch a commission to the city to “restore order” which was unnecessary because “conflict and disorder do not exist in Hamburg.”

its immediate hinterlands. Moreover, its militia was never as structured as the Amsterdam civic militia nor did it bear the same social significance. It never played the prominent political role that the Amsterdam militia did at several junctures: in 1617–18, 1672, 1702–8, and 1747–8.⁵³ At no point in Hamburg's history, even during the virtual civil war that reigned in the late seventeenth century, did the militia *qua* militia take an active role.

Internally, an interlocking structure of variously assembled councils governed all aspects of urban life. The exact make-up, the powers allocated to them, and the political clout of each, however, differed as did access to them. Of all the deceptive similarities that characterize how political cultures evolved in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, perhaps none is more important than the variation in these councils and the opportunities for political expression that such structures opened up or closed off.

Because the very structures of urban government greatly influenced political culture, it is necessary to discuss each city's peculiarities in considerable detail. These explanations permit more probing analyses of how politicking worked locally as well as providing a framework for understanding mercantile concerns and how these influenced political life.

Amsterdam: the rule of the regents

The governing elite in Amsterdam controlled virtually all major and lesser political offices. The thirty-six member *vroedschap*, whose members were called *schepenen* (imperfectly translated here as magistrates; they were also sometimes judges), formed the primary body of government. Membership in the *vroedschap* was for life and most members held other positions, such as burgomaster, and sat in one of the many administrative colleges or in the law courts. Because the most powerful urban posts, including the puissant burgomasters, were selected from the *vroedschap*, membership formed the essential step for anyone with serious political ambitions. Other administrative councils executed the many functions of government. Especially critical here were the Commissioners of Bankruptcy (members of the *desolate boedelkamer*). Founded in 1644 as one of the lesser benches and in response to a wave of financial collapses, this branch of government became increasingly busy over time as one might expect in a booming mercantile center.⁵⁴

Men who already held positions in the government chose their successors and colleagues: these were known collectively as the rulers (*regeerders*) of Amsterdam. Almost without exception, the victors who walked away with

⁵³ Israel, 424–5, 455–6, 763–7, 796–805, 1073–6. See also Marijke Carasso-Kok and J. Levy-van Halm (eds.), *Schutters in Holland: Kracht en zenuwen van de stad* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1988).

⁵⁴ Sjoerd Faber, Jacobine Huisken, and Friso Lammertse, *Van Heeren, die hunn' stoel en kussen niet beschaemen: Het stadsbestuur van Amsterdam in de 17e en 18e eeuw* (Amsterdam: Stichting Koninklijk Paleis te Amsterdam, 1987), 42, 46, 58; Tirion, 5: 155–74.

positions like burgomaster, were arranged in advance. All came from a group of elite families known collectively as the regents (*regenten*) who shared power and rotated jobs “in turn” (the Dutch phrase is *bij toerbeurt*). Not too surprisingly, the men who finally secured these posts usually followed a rough-and-ready *cursus honorum*, moving from entry-level jobs, such as that of City Secretary, through various administrative and judicial colleges before reaching the pinnacle of burgomaster. Of course, many never scaled the whole pyramid and remained permanently stuck on the lower steps or moved laterally.⁵⁵

This thin slice of the population, these regent families, helped their own up the ladder, guiding their feet on the rungs, extending them a helping hand when they slipped, or, for that matter, letting them drop if they proved difficult or inept, just as they hindered the rise of outsiders or thwarted ambitious rivals.⁵⁶ Rules theoretically prevented the consolidation of familial blocks by restricting the number of relatives who could sit simultaneously in any given council, but there remained plenty of room for preferential treatment. Joachim van Rendorp, for instance, listed the ways in which a young regent like himself benefited from family connections and friends:

Due to their influence I became a magistrate, a *Meesterknapp* of Holland, a Director of [the] Surinam [Company]. [I also received] my commission in the Dutch Auditor's Office and became burgomaster. Then, [I entered] the *Gecommitteerde Raden* and the Admiralty. I was indebted [for all this] to the *arrangements* that existed in the government of our city.⁵⁷

Power-players in this high-stakes political game were the members of the vroedschap and especially the four extremely influential burgomasters. While the vroedschap had once enjoyed some independence from the burgomasters, by the seventeenth century its autonomy had withered.⁵⁸ The vroedschap basically rubber-stamped proposals handed it by the burgomasters; the latter possessed the final say on virtually all matters. Perhaps most important, all major offices in the city and the directorships (*bewindhebberschappen*) of the Dutch East and West India companies lay in their collective gift. Indeed, the burgomasters became “almost indistinguishable from the directorship of the East India Company” and the burgomasters, therefore, basically controlled

⁵⁵ Faber, *Heeren*, 10–11, 61; on elections, 157–60; on sheriff-schout, Bontemantel, 1: 1–90; Wagenaar, 3: 279–85 (schout), 3: 307–409 (schepenen).

⁵⁶ Defining exactly who belonged to the regent group is not an easy task. J. Leslie Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Politics of Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 32–5.

⁵⁷ Quoted in George Willem Vreede, “Familie-regeringen in de republiek der Vereenigde Nederlanden,” *Geschied- en letterkundige herinneringen* (Gorinchem: W. van der Wal, 1836), 2: 30.

⁵⁸ One knowledgeable observer noted that “the renowned six-and-thirty . . . were never able to exert much power.” Brugmans, 73.

the Amsterdam Chamber (*kamer*). During his quarter-year in office, each presiding burgomaster also exercised an exclusive right to name “all offices of lesser weight”; these posts included more than 3000 major and minor jobs from peat-carriers, to grain-measurers, to city midwives, to toll-gate keepers. Despite their humble titles, some enjoyed great incomes; the postmasters certainly did. Even a lowly sailmaker, like Jan Struys, or at least his ghostwriter, understood the essentiality of soliciting the patronage of powerful men.⁵⁹

The burgomasters advantageously deployed their patronage rights widely throughout multiple social and economic strata. The burgomasters’ ability to open or occlude access to the higher governing circles and to distribute offices, even petty ones, formed the foundation of their great power. They remained well aware of the value of these liaisons and painstakingly nurtured them. The burgomaster Joan Huydecoper (1625–1704) kept written accounts of the services and favors he received and rendered in order to maintain in good working order a network based on family ties that he regarded as “one of his greatest social assets.” It was also one of his greatest *political* assets.⁶⁰ These forms of influence, as well as the ability to control elections to the *vroedschap* and burgomastership, produced incidents that later generations viewed as corrupt and that, even in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, often bred conflict and dissent within regent circles and caused what has been called “the permanent factional strife that characterized politics in Amsterdam.”⁶¹

Despite their substantial power, the burgomasters hardly governed alone.⁶² At the base of this elaborate structure of political offices rested the civic militia, a modest but by no means inconsequential cog in the entire machinery. The militia was “a very remarkable feature in Amsterdam’s civic life.” Many citizens who never approached the charmed circle of real political power, but who were nevertheless well-to-do and respected, could become members, even officers, in the militia.⁶³ Each company had a captain who was also a wardmaster (*wijkmeester*). Most people know the civic militia best from the many group pictures, the famous *schutterstuk*s, painted in the seventeenth century. As is so apparent from these portraits, the group also functioned as a social club and its members belonged to what has been called an “elite of the second rank,” that is, those who possessed limited wealth and an assured position in the

⁵⁹ On the burgomasters, see Bontemantel, 1: 101, 133–4, 152–3. More generally on the organization of government in Amsterdam, see vols. 2–4 of Brugmans (2nd rev. edn.); *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*. Still useful is Jan Wagenaar, *Amsterdam, in zyne opkomst, aanwas, geschiedenis, voorregten, koophandel, gebouwen, kerkenstaat, scholen, schutterye, gilden en regeeringe* (4 vols.; Amsterdam: Isaak Tirion, 1760). Kees Boterbloem, *The Fiction and Reality of Jan Struys, A Seventeenth-Century Dutch Globetrotter* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33.

⁶⁰ Prak, *Dutch Republic*, 129. ⁶¹ Lesger, *Rise*, 173 (quote). ⁶² Brugmans, 3: 73.

⁶³ On the militia officers, see Paul Knevel, *Burgers in het geweer: De schutterijen in Holland, 1550–1700* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994), 112–55.

neighborhood but cut no major figure in the city at large. Regents and their sons pretty much monopolized the officers' ranks.⁶⁴

The character of civic militias, as the subsequent discussions on Antwerp and Hamburg demonstrate, varied considerably from place to place, and their forms and functions shifted significantly over time. Of particular importance here is the degree to which the civic militias were, or were not, political structures and organized representatives of the citizenry. The idea of an armed citizenry traces back to the Renaissance. Machiavelli argued that an intimate relationship existed between the status of a citizen and his ability to defend himself and his city. Citizens-in-arms, that is, militias, formed a much emphasized theme in classical republicanism and one that persisted throughout the early modern period.⁶⁵ Citizen militias possessed some qualities of political organs, whether or not they proved at crucial junctures counterweights to oligarchic government, effective representatives of a broader citizenry, and actors or instigators in insurrections and uprisings.⁶⁶

The militia in Amsterdam was organized by ward into companies. Heading each was a captain. Captainship in the militia was not, technically, a governing office, but the position "gave to whoever possessed it, the plausible hope that he might one day be brought into government," or rather, as the knowledgeable insider Hans Bontemantel observed, officers came from the members of

⁶⁴ The wardmasters functioned as the sensitive fingertip of the government on the pulse of the population. Moreover, the militia formed something like an organized citizenry. Exactly how the wardmasters functioned and exactly what clout they wielded are rather difficult matters to fix historically. The militia members viewed their original purpose as "the defense of citizens and their liberties" and thus considered themselves the "core" of the citizenry. During a series of civic disturbances in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the civic militia assumed several active roles, most famously in the Doelisten movement of 1747–8. One point in their program of desiderata demanded that citizens should chose the burgomasters and the directors of the India companies directly, and also that militia members themselves select their officers from the ranks. Knevel, *Burgers*; C. Jackson Grayson, "The Civic Militia in the County of Holland," *BMGN-LCHR* 95 (1981): 35–63; Brugmans, 3: 277; Pieter Geyl, *Historische appreciaties van het zeventiende-eeuwse Hollandse regentenregiem* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1954), 3; Nico J. J. de Voogd, *De doelistenbeweging te Amsterdam in 1748* (Utrecht: H. de Vroede, 1914); Israel, 1075.

⁶⁵ Michael Mallett, "The Theory and Practice of Warfare in Machiavelli's Republic," in Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (eds.), *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 173–80; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 383–412; Winfried Schluz, *Landesdefension und Staatsbildung: Studien zum Kriegswesen des innerösterreichischen Territorialstaates (1564–1619)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1973), 215–42.

⁶⁶ See the special issue of *TVSG* 23 (1997, no. 1) on civic militias and especially the articles by Maarten Prak, "Burgers onder de wapenen, van de zestiende tot de achttiende eeuw," 1–11 and Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, "Civic Militia and Urban Liberties in Early Modern Germany," 52–60. On the political clout and activities of the militia, see Paul Knevel, "Onrust onder schutters: De politieke invloed van de Hollandse schutterijen in de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw," *Holland, regionaal-historisch tijdschrift* 20 (1988): 158–74; A. F. Salomons, "De rol van de Amsterdamse burgerbeweging in de wetsverzetting van 1672," *BMGN-LCHR* 106 (1991): 198–219; Grayson, "Civic Militia."

the governing councils or those with reasonable pretensions thereto – that is, from regent circles. Bontemantel's own ascent up the ladder of urban political power had begun in 1650 with a lieutenancy. The next two years saw him as a Commissioner of Minor Affairs. In 1653, he became an auditor and accomplished the leap into the *vroedschap*, while simultaneously advancing to captain in the militia. In 1654 he was selected *schepen* (an office he held repeatedly, in 1668, 1669, 1671, 1672) and was concurrently a director of the East India Company. Between occupying those central positions, he served as a member of the board of directors of the orphanage, a treasurer, and, for five years, headed the excise office. In the twenty-two year period from 1650 to 1672, he was out of office only for two years (1658–9) while remaining, of course, a member of the *vroedschap* and the college of the *schepen-emeriti*, as well as an East India Company director. He never reached the top; he was never chosen burgomaster perhaps because of the early death of his patron, Frans Banning Cocq, in 1665. The political upheaval of 1672 then abruptly ended Bontemantel's political career.⁶⁷

Other organized groups of citizens, such as guilds, were constitutionally unimportant in Amsterdam. Unlike in many smaller cities throughout north-western Europe, guilds in large mercantile centers rarely exercised much clout economically and even less politically; the same held for Hamburg. Whereas in some early modern cities, especially in earlier centuries, guilds had their assigned places in government they possessed little obvious political influence in Amsterdam, despite their strength in numbers; in 1688 there were thirty-seven guilds with 11,000 members and fifty guilds with over 14,000 by the middle of the eighteenth century.⁶⁸

The influence of ordinary citizens and their ability, or desire, to participate in politics as normally understood remained small. Older historiography has tended to describe a period of harmony and cooperation between simple citizens and those who occupied places in the higher, or even highest, councils, as an era of good feeling that had arisen during the Revolt and persisted for some time afterwards. Accordingly, "in those days a strong bond between governors and citizens" existed despite the fact that the citizenry per se elected

⁶⁷ John A. Jochems, *Amsterdams oude burgervendels (schutterij), 1580–1795: Met historische aanteekeningen* (Amsterdam: S. L. van Looy, 1888), 1–2, 96; Kernkamp, introduction to Bontemantel, 1: xxi. On Bontemantel's career, see *ibid.*, xviii, xx–xxi and DBNL. Frans Banning Cocq (1600–55) was elected burgomaster several times. He was also an advisor to his powerful brothers-in-law, Cornelis and Andries de Graeff, each chosen several times as burgomasters of Amsterdam. Cocq is the central figure (with a red sash) as militia captain in Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*.

⁶⁸ Israel, 1015; Brugmans, 3: 26–7. "Guilds and burger militias exerted little influence on everyday politics, although magistrates had to consider their feelings as they were able to mobilize support." Marjolein C. t'Hart, *The Making of a Bourgeois State: War, Politics, and Finance during the Dutch Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 25n35. See also Knevel, "Onrust."

no council directly. The two groups felt “tied to each other,” more so, perhaps, than if such councils had been freely elected. Thus, one historian concluded that, “the governors and citizens formed one body that developed into a firm union.”⁶⁹

Into this harmonious (and imaginary) paradise, however, soon slithered the snakes of ambition and greed. A long-accepted story runs something like this: during the seventeenth century, the once precious unity of citizens and elites fractured and the government came to approximate a system of subjects and rulers. The regents become more exclusive in social terms and had already begun to withdraw from active commerce in favor of buying land and investing, a movement that produced a marked aristocratization.⁷⁰ Despite the “annoyance” this metamorphosis caused, overall the citizenry apparently expressed little concern with political matters or was even fully apathetic. The few popular disturbances were quickly overcome by either retracting a despised rule, reducing a noxious tax, or shifting an especially offensive member of the government out of office. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, several examples of virtually dictatorial burgomasters could be found. One such was the powerful Gillis Valckenier who rose in the wake of the governmental change in 1672. According to the English ambassador, Sir Henry Sidney, his power approached that of “The Grand Turk” and “what he said was immediately done without a word of protest.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Brugmans, 3: 77. Although I have used the 1972–3 second edition of Brugmans, he first wrote the volumes before World War II.

⁷⁰ Whether this actually created an aristocratization of the regent group in Amsterdam or not is a hotly debated subject and one which concerns us more fully in [Chapters 2–4](#). Older historiography accepted the idea of the increasing “aristocratization” of the Amsterdam (and other) regents, expressed, for example, in the retreat from active commerce, the purchase of estates, and the assumption of noble or noble-like titles. Elias certainly thought that the younger generation then coming into power strove “actively to [create] a sharper division between regents and citizens” and one could already observe “their retreat from active trade.” Elias-2, 99, 101. See also Daniel J. Roorda, “The Ruling Classes in Holland in the Seventeenth Century,” in John S. Bromley and Ernst H. Kossman (eds.), *Britain and the Netherlands* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1964), 2: 109–32. Further study of the regents and their supposed aristocratization has, however, produced a more complicated picture. In the 1993 English translation of his 1984 Dutch work on the nobility (*The Nobility of Holland: From Knights to Regents, 1500–1650*, trans. by Maarten Uitee [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993]), Henk van Nierop revised his previous analysis of the phenomenon: “The view of contemporaries and historians that the regent-patriciate competed with the nobility through the purchase of manors and the pursuit of titles now appears simplistic, to put it mildly. Among the urban patriciate, the possession of manors was exceptional and remained so even in the eighteenth century” (xi).

Price suggests that trying to determine the extent of any such aristocratization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries “may be . . . hunting the Snark.” He finds the evidence for the seventeenth century “not only unsystematic and anecdotal, its significance is often far from clear” and concludes that “the regents were becoming more of a specialized profession, [but] not an aristocracy.” *Holland*, 53, 56.

⁷¹ Quoted in Brugmans, 3: 184.

So runs the conventional analysis; while a difference between the elites and the ordinary citizens always existed, not until the end of the seventeenth century, with the acquisition of land as a safe investment, did elites in Amsterdam begin to acquire the quality of an aristocracy and the government that of an oligarchy. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, this aristocracy supposedly formed itself as a relatively closed ruling elite – the regents – that throughout the remainder of the Republic's life, that is, until 1795, governed well or poorly; opinions diverge.⁷²

In the middle of the eighteenth century, complaints about the deep corruption of the regents' regime grew. The "republic of the regents," as it existed from the death of Willem III (1702) until the Orangist revolution (the Doelisten movement) in 1747 and then, finally, the Patriot Revolution of 1780–7, became the target of growing discontent that reviled its corruption and its arrogance. Nineteenth-century historians described a structure entirely rotten, poisoned by unscrupulous or even felonious behavior. They especially focused on the explicit arrangements, known as contracts of correspondence (*contracten van correspondentie*), that parceled out positions in government in turn among the regent families.⁷³

One should be wary about accepting the judgment older historiography has made of the shift in government styles and political cultures in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. More recent historiography has taken a somewhat different stance and, for instance, has seen in the contracts an attempt to preserve civic peace and prevent elite in-fighting. If the general story of a coalescence, or even a calcification of the membership of elite circles and a continued decline in the power of the *vroedschap* and the citizenry more generally has held up, several scholars have argued that these oligarchies, even the most corrupt ones, did not necessarily rule badly or ineffectively; most were "excellent caretakers and governors." Moreover, the contracts did not "really succeed in turning the patrician families into a closed group, cut off from other social groups," and especially not from wealthy merchants.⁷⁴

⁷² *Ibid.*, 261–2, 277.

⁷³ The first written contract of correspondence in Amsterdam dates from 1752, but unwritten agreements existed long before then. The most extensive nineteenth-century examination of the contracts, and of the corruption that they supposedly represented, is Johan de Witt Citters, *Contracten van correspondentie en andere bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van het ambtsbejag in de Republiek der Vereenigde Nederlanden* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1873). More positive are the assessments of Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005) and Luuc Kooijmans, *Vriendschap en de kunst van het overleven in de seventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1997). For an excellent discussion of how contracts worked in practice and in particular instances, see Maarten Prak, *Gezeten burgers: De elite in een Hollandse stad Leiden 1700–1780* (The Hague: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1985).

⁷⁴ Several scholars working on cities in the Netherlands have argued convincingly that urban oligarchic governments remained quite efficient until about the 1780s. See Prak, *Gezeten burgers*;

What about the *burgerij*, the general citizenry? What position did it hold in the broader governmental structure and what were its possibilities for political expression? Before those questions can be answered, it is necessary to understand the make-up of the citizenry in Amsterdam. Amsterdam's rules on citizenship closely resembled those pertaining in many other early modern cities and, especially, in mercantile centers. Access to participation in most urban and civic activities – economic and religious as well as civic and political – usually depended on citizenship. As held true for all early modern cities, substantial differences separated citizens from non-citizens and factors of religion, wealth, and birth sieved them out. Before about 1800, no European government except France's revolutionary one seriously proposed a general and uniform citizenship that included all groups indiscriminately and which granted all equal civic and political powers; previously “popular sovereignty” possessed a far more corporate quality. In many parts of Europe, this metamorphosis occurred only in the mid to late nineteenth century, often accelerated by massive political upheavals.⁷⁵

In Amsterdam, different types of citizenship pertained, and each possessed advantages, duties, and responsibilities.⁷⁶ Rules divided citizens into three

Luuc Kooijmans, *Onder regenten: De elite in een Hollandse stad, Hoorn, 1700–1780* (Amsterdam: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1985); and Johannes de Jong, *Met goed fatsoen: De elite in een Hollandse stad, Gouda 1700–1780* (The Hague: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1985). On the lack of a real closure in regent circles, De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 588. Similarly, venality was not corruption when it was the system, William Doyle, *Venality: The Sale of Office in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 319. Even what we regard as corrupt and reprehensible practices, such as the sale of Hessian soldiers to the British for use against the American rebels, looks different when situated in the state of Hesse where the profits from the trade underwrote programs of reform and improvement, see Charles Ingrao, *The Hessian Mercenary State: Ideas, Institutions, and Reform under Frederick II, 1760–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁷⁵ Article “Bürger” in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (8 vols.; Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1972–7), 1: 704–5; Jürgen Kocka, “Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit als Probleme der deutschen Geschichte vom späten 18. bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert,” in Jürgen Kocka, *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 21–30; Ido de Haan, *Zelfbestuur en staatsbeheer: Het politieke debat over burgerschap en rechtsstaat in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1993), 35; Nico C. F. van Sas, “Tweedragt overall: Het patriotisme en de uitvinding van de moderne politiek,” in Hans Bots and Wijnand Mijnhardt (eds.), *De Droom van de revolutie: Nieuwe benaderingen van het patriotisme* (Amsterdam: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1988), 23–5.

⁷⁶ On citizenship in the Dutch Republic, see Maarten Prak, “Burghers, Citizens and Popular Politics in the Dutch Republic,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30 (1997): 443–8; Harald Hendrix and Marijke Keijer Drees, *Beschafde burgers: Burgerlijkheid in de vroegmoderne tijd* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001); Erika Kuijpers and Maarten Prak, “Burger, ingezetene, vreemdeling: Burgerschap in Amsterdam in de 17e en 18e eeuw,” in Joost Kloek and Karin Tilmans (eds.), *Burger: Een geschiedenis van het begrip “burger” in de Nederlanden van de Middeleeuwen tot de 21ste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), 113–32.

groups: those, including women, who purchased citizenship for a fee of generally *f*50; those who acquired citizenship by marrying a female citizen; and those who were born citizens.⁷⁷ The children of citizens automatically became citizens, except for the offspring of Jewish citizens who had to re-purchase citizenship in each generation. Unlike many places, few restrictions determined who could become a citizen; religion was certainly not one. The major barrier was cost. Citizens enjoyed a broad range of rights and privileges: all could exercise a citizen's livelihood (*poorters-neering*), all possessed freedom from custom fees; all were tried by Amsterdam's laws; and, finally, orphans of citizens were admitted to the municipal orphanage. In addition, seven years' residence in the city qualified all equally for public office. Equal eligibility did not, of course, mean equal *opportunity*.⁷⁸

Yet not everyone legally resident in the city purchased or enjoyed full citizenship. In order to entice more people of small means but reputable occupation to join the civic family, the city created a less expensive type of citizenship – the *ingezetenschap* or residency – that allowed admission to the guilds and the exercise of a citizen's livelihood. The category did not exclude Jews.⁷⁹ Numerous cities followed this path because it offered many advantages. First, it made it possible for useful persons to reside, work, and marry in the city, even if they lacked full citizenship. Second, the city theoretically gained better control over its population. Third, as the number of guilds expanded in the late seventeenth century, the category of residence permitted more guildsmen to acquire a form of citizenship. Finally, the city drew at least some revenue from these second-class citizens.

Legally, all full citizens possessed identical civic and political rights; all were equally eligible for selection to the *vroedschap*, for instance. Reality differed. By the middle of the seventeenth century, inside observers, like Bontemantel, already referred to these elections as “de groote cuyp,” that is, the great sham. Even earlier, in 1564, citizens demanded that *schepenen* and members of *vroedschap* should be chosen “from the wealthiest, most honorable, most notable, most honest, and most peace-loving men” and neither hatred, nor jealousy, nor “any other matter whatsoever” should determine their selection.⁸⁰ Such limitations were common in the self-governing cities of the early modern period and

⁷⁷ The history of purchasing citizenship is complicated. By 1650, citizenship cost *f*50 which represented a considerable rise in price, about six times as expensive as a quarter century before. Significant price inflation then ended. In 1652, the *vroedschap* experimented with creating a *grootburgerschap* for a price of *f*450 that gave its purchasers the right to sit in the *vroedschap* and to take on other “considerable charges.” It was not a success and was abolished in 1668 and the right to all offices was then theoretically restored to all “ordinary” citizens. Wagenaar, 3: 142–3; Hendriz and Drees, *Beschaafde burgers*, 26–9.

⁷⁸ Wagenaar, 3: 141–63; Tirion, 5: 146–9; Hendriz and Drees, *Beschaafde burgers*, 26–7; Kuijpers and Maarten “Burger, ingezetene, vreemdeling.”

⁷⁹ Wagenaar, 3: 143; Hendriz and Drees, *Beschaafde burgers*, 27–8.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Hendriz and Drees, *Beschaafde burgers*, 28.

protests often came from those who had either been pushed out of the circle or felt justified in seeking admittance. Neither wealth nor connections alone determined inclusion, however. Christoffel Brants, for example, had become an Amsterdam citizen in 1704. He maintained an extensive trade with Russia and had grown extremely wealthy, leaving at his death in 1732 a huge estate of at least f2,000,000. When Peter the Great visited Amsterdam in 1717, he lodged with Brants. Brants, however, never held any political office. Of course, not all wealthy respectable men actually *desired* a political position. Still, Brants's case stands as an excellent example of someone who possessed a goodly number of the prerequisites for office, but who never attained it.⁸¹

One might come away from this discussion with the impression that Amsterdam's regents formed an almost totally closed elite, difficult for outsiders to penetrate and tremulously sensitive to assaults on its prerogatives. The question of whether an elite is open or closed always remains a relative judgment; it is simultaneously best answered comparatively. Peter Burke, in analyzing seventeenth-century Amsterdam and Venice, came to the conclusion that "in Amsterdam there was a fairly loosely defined or open group who were eligible to rule, the citizens, but a much more closed inner group who actually ruled." Still, "it is not difficult to find burgomasters of Amsterdam whose ancestors had not been regents at all." Thus, when compared to Venice's legally definite patrician elite, he found Amsterdam a more open society, with greater possibilities to move both up and, for that matter, down the social and economic ladders. In fact, ways to draw "new men" into economic and political circles existed in all three cities.⁸²

Antwerp: a republic in decline, or no republic at all?

If Amsterdam counted as the "bourgeois republic" par excellence, Antwerp offered an alternative form where a number of factors diluted its republican character. On the surface of things, little distinguished it from Amsterdam and Hamburg. Roughly corresponding to the Amsterdam *vroedschap*, for example, was the Antwerp *schepenenbank* that formed part of the wider group of the magistracy. The tasks allotted to the Antwerp's magistracy, like those in Amsterdam, were multifarious: its members possessed extensive political, administrative, and judicial functions. Originally, *schepenen* served for life, a custom that frequently led to the dominance of certain families who held on to power by coopting relatives and friends. Since 1354, rules regulated their appointment: they "must be natives of Brabant and have been citizens of Antwerp for at least a year and a day." In our period, the governor of the Spanish or Austrian Netherlands chose the *schepenen* and the two

⁸¹ Brugmans, 3: 273–7.

⁸² Peter Burke, *Venice and Amsterdam: A Study of Seventeenth-Century Élites* (London: Temple Smith, 1974), 25, 27, 32.

burgomasters from lists submitted by the city, on the advice of the magistrates, the bishop, and the sheriff. Likewise, beginning in 1356, cooptation rights as well as the permanence of the schepenen ended; from then on the bench was renewed each year and, once off, one had to wait two years to return. Practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries closely followed this rule and rarely did the magistracy continue in office more than a single year and never longer than two.

That situation shifted in the eighteenth century, when it became by no means uncommon for the same group of men, collectively known as the “government” (*wet*), to retain office much longer, often for a span of six or seven years. The best authority on the structure of Antwerp’s government in these years, René Boumans, notes that the Austrians fostered the custom hoping thereby to maintain men in office “whose feelings of devotion to the service of His Majesty are self-evident.” The number of schepenen also rose over time; from 1556 to the end of the *ancien régime*, eighteen was the fixed number. In addition, no candidate could be proposed whose relationship with another family member was close. Moreover, the candidate had to be at least 25 years old, of legitimate birth, Catholic, and not living in an adulterous union. Specifically excluded were artisans and guild members, officers of the duke of Brabant, and those who farmed excise taxes.

Rules are made to be broken, or at least bent, and one can list examples of schepenen who had not reached the required age of majority. In the seventeenth century, Antoon van Berchem was 24 and Jan Albert van Hove just 22. Close relatives could be found sitting together, albeit not regularly. In 1667, for example, Hendrik van den Werve was First Burgomaster while his son, Jan Augustijn, was a schepen. Such power-crystallizations could be constructed differently by having one man rotate with another through the office of schepen and First Burgomaster or that of Treasurer-General. From 1585 to 1621, two powerful individuals, Nicolaas Rockox and Jacques Dassa did just that while Rockox’s brother, Jan, also served as First Burgomaster in 1617. Especially in the eighteenth century, exceptions proliferated and dispensations were granted to men who did not necessarily fulfill all the requirements but whose presence in the magistracy incumbents desired.⁸³

⁸³ *Antwerpen, 17de*, 4; Boumans, 15–16. Only twenty times over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did the magistracy remain in office longer than a single year. My discussion of the structure of Antwerp’s city government relies heavily on the published work of Boumans and on three *licentiaaten* done in the 1980s: Inge Ghys, “De Antwerpse magistraat in een laat-humanistische en contra-reformatorische period, 1585–1621: Een institutionele, sociaal-economische en culturele analyse” (2 vols., *Licentiaat in geschiedenis*; Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1987/88); Lutgard Turnhout, “De magistraat te Antwerpen, 1650–1674: Een bijdrage tot de institutionele en sociale geschiedenis” (2 vols., *Licentiaat in geschiedenis*; Rijksuniversiteit Ghent, 1980); Gerda van de Broeck, “De Antwerpse Magistraat 1675–1699: Een bijdrage tot de institutionele en sociale geschiedenis” (2 vols., *Licentiaat in geschiedenis*; Rijksuniversiteit Ghent, 1980).

The Antwerp burgomasters, two in number, were selected from and by the schepenen. Although in earlier times the schepen college itself chose the burgomasters, in the eighteenth century the Austrian-appointed governor named them after consultation with his own officials. By the eighteenth century, the more important of the two was the First. The Second Burgomaster, his junior colleague in power, if in neither age nor seniority, principally presided over the schepenen in all juridical matters. In addition, other major members of the government included the several treasurers, a number of secretaries, and the pensionary. These together comprised a group similar to what Amsterdam knew as *regeerders* or city governors. The schepen college achieved its more or less final form in the fourteenth century. Another body, the Monday Council, so called because it met on Monday mornings, included all the above as well as twelve or thirteen representatives of the guilds. A Broad Council first took shape in the sixteenth century. The Broad Council “regulated the general administration of the policies of the city, as well as matters of social and economic life.” It comprised four groups, each possessing a single corporative vote. The first estate included all the current burgomasters, schepenen, and treasurers; the second the emeriti-schepenen. The third represented the citizens and consisted of four headmen and a number of wardmasters. The representatives of “privileged” guilds made up the fourth and final group.⁸⁴

Despite the extensive range of duties the Broad Council theoretically possessed, it mostly exerted little real power and the Political Regulation of 1659 had done much to emasculate it, forbidding the Council to meet without being summoned by the magistracy or to discuss anything absent from the prescribed agenda. Thus, after the middle of the seventeenth century, the magistracy usually dominated; all initiatives lay with it. Like similar councils in other cities, the Broad Council advised rather than legislated. It could only rarely check the magistracy, although it remained a center of opposition to more aggressive centralizing initiatives when they arose. The magistracy and, especially, the burgomasters, however, basically ran the urban show.⁸⁵

Equally important, the city possessed considerable autonomy in internal matters, administration, and justice as what one observer terms “a state within the state.” Still, the selection process always permitted the central government in Brussels to assert some control or at least exert pressure. The governor, on the advice of the sheriff and the Broad Council, chose the eighteen schepenen from a list submitted to him with thirty-six names; eighteen were serving schepenen. The schepenen themselves sent forward nine other names and the wardmasters the same number. Most “new men” came from the wardmasters’ list. In the period 1772–89, ten schepenen had previously been wardmasters and four headmen.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Antwerpen*, 17de, 11–23; Boumans, 30–2.

⁸⁵ Prims, 6A: 161. This Political Regulation was repeated and strengthened several times, especially in 1681 and then in 1752, Prims, 7: 46–8; Mertens/Torfs, 5: 501–2.

⁸⁶ *Antwerpen*, 17de, 4; Boumans, 217–18.

Nonetheless, because all taxes and loans in Brabant had to be approved by the Estates (that is, the representatives of the clergy, the nobles, and the three main cities: Brussels, Antwerp, and Leuven), the normally weak Broad Council could momentarily acquire weight. In the eighteenth century, it met frequently, and often for quite extended periods, to deliberate on money matters. The 1659 Political Regulation had often been ignored and, despite being reissued in 1681, not until 1752 were stronger measures introduced. Only then did Vienna really attempt to throttle back the power of Broad Councils in Antwerp and other cities. Thus, and despite its position within the Spanish or Austrian Netherlands, Antwerp, like Amsterdam and Hamburg, remained basically self-governing and that situation formed a critical moment in the formation of its political culture. Yet, the outside influence of Brussels was palpable and repeatedly, often painfully, felt.⁸⁷

In Antwerp, the wardmasters acted as the organized representatives of the citizenry. As in Amsterdam, the wards provided the framework for the civic guard; their leaders came from the middling layers of society. The wardmasters tended to consider themselves the guardians of citizen rights and civic liberties. In the 1550s and 1560s, the wardmasters, along with the guild representatives, defended in the Broad Council the right of “heretical citizens” (that is, non-Catholics) to retain their citizenship.⁸⁸ In the eighteenth century, however, the position of wardmaster consumed more time and involved them in the long-term struggles between the central authority and the city over money. Difficulties in finding men to fill the post presented the Comte de Cobenzl, the Austrian’s chief minister in the Southern Netherlands in the 1760s, with an excuse to halve their number; this reduced group was then selected from “sober-minded and biddable citizens who knew how to keep to the straight and narrow path of obedience.”⁸⁹

The social composition of the magistracy reflected political and social realities. In the seventeenth century, in a sample of 286 members, 149 (52%) were nobles, 80 (28%) were jurists, and 57 (20%) were rentiers or merchants. In the late eighteenth century (specifically from 1772 to 1789), Boumans found that most schepenen (about 72%) were trained in law; the rest were major merchants and rentiers. Many jurists, however, came from prominent merchant and banking families. Artisans were excluded. In 1678, the brewer Aert van Uffels came forward as a candidate-schepen and the magistracy, when interrogated as to “whether a brewer was or was not eligible,” decided that the city’s laws prohibited his selection. Equally striking for Antwerp is that quite a numerous group, indeed a majority (64%) of the magistracy were nobles – a situation that existed neither in Amsterdam nor Hamburg. Nonetheless, as a mid eighteenth-century sheriff reported, “at all times one placed in the magistracy certain gentlemen, lawyers, and [some of] the most notable merchants.” Men already in the service of the governor were also ineligible to become

⁸⁷ Boumans, 15 (quote), 21–6, 36–8, 40–4.

⁸⁸ Marnef, *Antwerp*, 27, 86. ⁸⁹ Boumans, 41.

members of the magistracy. Thus, in 1692 Lamberti van Kessel and Engelgrave van Dyck were disqualified for just this reason.⁹⁰

To what extent, then, was Antwerp's magistracy closed or did it resemble the somewhat closed, but also somewhat open regent elite of Amsterdam? In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, a small clique of families pretty much controlled the magistracy. Some five families were almost constantly, and repeatedly, represented. Nevertheless, they "were never able to prevent newcomers from controlling part of the government and eventually taking over."⁹¹ In the late eighteenth century (between 1772 and 1789), for instance, twenty-two of fifty-four schepenen of noble background had one or more ancestors in the magistracy. That may seem a reasonably high percentage (about 41%). However, some fourteen of these could boast only a single predecessor in the government. Of less than 10 percent could it be said that they belonged to something like a politically dominant clan. These included the van de Werves, van Halmales, van den Cruyces, and Della Faille-Waarlooses. The results may have differed for the non-noble schepenen but probably not appreciably. If anything, the proportion of new men was probably greater there. While it is obvious that only a limited group enjoyed political rights and privileges, the exclusive control that the burgomasters and emeritus-burgomasters in Amsterdam exercised, especially in the two long stadhouder-less periods 1650–72 and 1702–47, never pertained in Antwerp.⁹²

Hamburg: a government of, by, and for merchants?

Hamburg's governmental structure approximated but also deviated from those of Amsterdam and Antwerp. Here, too, a series of interconnected councils ruled. Central were the city council (*Rat*) or Senate, the assembly of citizens, the *Bürgerschaft*, and several parish-based collegial bodies that also represented the citizenry. The Senate comprised four *Bürgermeisters* and twenty-four senators. Of the four *Bürgermeisters*, three had to be trained in law and, of the twenty-four senators, eleven were to be lawyers. The rest were almost invariably merchants. In this period only one artisan became a senator and only then in the context of a particularly tense political confrontation. The Hamburg Senate also included syndics and secretaries. All syndics held law degrees and functioned as legal experts as well as assuming, over time, an ever greater role in the conduct of foreign affairs.

⁹⁰ *Antwerpen, 17de*, 5–6; Boumans, 198, 202; Karel Degryse, "Stadsadel en stadsbestuur te Antwerpen in de 18de eeuw: Een sociaal-economische benadering," *TVG* 93 (1980): 477. On the case of the brewer, see A. E. van Valckenisse and J. Rylant, "De Kronijk van Antwerpen (1665–1698)," *BTG* 27 (1936): 134; on van Kessel and van Dyck, *ibid.*, 263. Karel Degryse reviewed and revised slightly upwards Boumans's numbers on nobles in Antwerp's government, but Boumans's general evaluation holds. Degryse, "Stadsadel," 466–7.

⁹¹ Broeck, "Antwerpse Magistraat," 1: 302. ⁹² Boumans, 203–7.

At the base of the political pyramid, anchoring the whole, lay parish organs. The Reformation revived and greatly increased the powers and visibility of ancient parish associations spawning three new collegial bodies composed of 144 subdeacons (the One Hundred Forty-Four), forty-eight deacons (the Forty-Eight), and twelve aldermen (three senior deacons from each parish; the *Oberalten*) representing the four metropolitan parishes. After the addition of a fifth parish in 1685, the first two became, respectively, the One Hundred Eighty and the Sixty. The number of aldermen rose to fifteen. Members of these bodies formed a governing elite roughly comparable to the *regeerders van Amsterdam* and the magistracy of Antwerp but whose responsibilities differed. The Hamburg Senate, for instance, unlike the vroedschap, functioned as a Superior Court (*Obergericht*).⁹³ The relationships among these bodies, and especially between the Senate and Bürgerschaft, suffered extreme strain from the mid sixteenth through to the beginning of the eighteenth century. Only the promulgation of a new constitution in 1712 (the Principal Recess) resolved these conflicts. As in Amsterdam and Antwerp, provisions prevented, at least theoretically, the simultaneous office-holding of close relatives and married kin.⁹⁴

After 1712, selection to the post of senator or Bürgermeister was *de jure*, and *de facto* before 1712, through cooption, as in Amsterdam and Antwerp, although in Hamburg no outside authorities such as the stadhouder or governor possessed rights of appointment or approval. The Senate exercised wide-ranging powers and controlled foreign policy, justice, and virtually all other parts of the urban administration including religion and education in ways that paralleled those in Amsterdam and considerably exceeded in their discretionary power that of the college of schepenen in Antwerp. Despite the Senate's undoubted strength and preeminence, the Bürgerschaft had to approve its decisions. As the Bürgerschaft usually met only twice a year, and was convened by the Senate, permanent councils consulted on most matters and only final decisions were submitted to the Bürgerschaft as a whole for ratification.⁹⁵

⁹³ Friedrich Georg Buek, *Die hamburgischen Oberalten, ihre bürgerliche Wirksamkeit und ihre Familien* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser, & Mauke, 1840); Nicholas A. Westphalen, *Hamburgs Verfassung und Verwaltung in ihrer allmählichen Entwicklung bis auf die neueste Zeit* (2 vols.; Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1846), 1: 216–19; Rainer Postel, "Reformation und bürgerliche Mitsprache in Hamburg," *ZVHG* 65 (1979): 1–20; Martin Ewald, *Der Hamburgische Staatsyndicus: Eine verwaltungsgeschichtliche Studie* (Hamburg: Kommissionsverlag Ludwig Appel, 1954).

⁹⁴ The provisions of the *Wahlrezeß* of 1663 were cited as the norm for determining selection of senators as well as setting limits on the familial relationships. Articles 12–14 prohibited fathers and sons, two brothers, fathers- and sons-in-law, and the like from sitting simultaneously. Westphalen, *Hamburgs Verfassung und Verwaltung*, 1: 51.

⁹⁵ On the organization of Hamburg's government, see the excellent description in Whaley, *Religious Toleration*, 13–22 and also Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 17–22. By far the best and most comprehensive guide to all aspects of Hamburg's government is Johann Klefeker, *Sammlung der Hamburgischen Gesetze und Verfassung in Bürger- und Kirchlichen, auch Cammer-Handlungs- und übrigen Policy-Angelegenheiten und Geschäften samt historischen Einleitungen* (12 vols.; Hamburg: Piscator, 1765–74).

The relationship, however, between the *Bürgerschaft* and the Senate in Hamburg differed from that pertaining between the *vroedschap* and burgomasters in Amsterdam. Indeed, one can argue that in Amsterdam nothing like the *Bürgerschaft* existed; the *vroedschap* was certainly *not* equivalent. In Antwerp the Broad Council was only *very roughly* comparable. The composition of all these bodies shifted over time and, in Hamburg, the size and social catchment area of the *Bürgerschaft* expanded quite forcefully in the mid to late seventeenth century but contracted substantially after 1712. Thereafter, only propertied citizens who “possessed unencumbered property [of a certain and fluctuating value] either within the city itself or its territories” exercised what might be evaluated as full political rights. They formed the core of voting citizens in the sessions of the *Bürgerschaft*; in 1800, with a population of well over 100,000, the number of enfranchised persons lay somewhere between 3000 and 4000. These same men were eligible for election to the several councils; in fact, only about 300–350 actually governed.⁹⁶

The Hamburg *Bürgermeister*s had once possessed some of the remarkable prerogatives and privileges the Amsterdam burgomasters enjoyed. Over time, however, the *Bürgerschaft* had successfully whittled away these rights. While at the end of the seventeenth century the *Bürgermeister*s still legally controlled the distribution of many offices, and could unofficially manipulate appointment to others, they had to abide by arrangements struck in 1684 that provided for the sale or lease of many communal posts, including various clerks, foremen on building projects, and almoners at the poorhouse to name just some.⁹⁷ They lacked, for instance, the great political patronage plum of naming directors to the India companies. While it was possible, and perhaps even common, for them to advance relatives or friends, the provisions for sale of offices reduced favoritism; only a handful of outright sinecures and no such lucrative ones

⁹⁶ While the property qualifications were critical in determining eligibility, in the eighteenth century, faced with the problem of achieving a quorum in the *Bürgerschaft*, the list of those allowed to attend the meetings of the *Bürgerschaft* “regardless of what property they owned,” included: members of the One Hundred Eighty and the Sixty, militia captains, guild elders, and those who held or had held any major communal offices. Even then, attendance was quite weak. Moreover, some Propertied Citizens were explicitly excluded from office: all non-Lutherans; those in the service of foreign governments, city employees (including, for instance, the professors at the city’s *Johanneum*), all those “who do not actually maintain a hearth within the walls,” and – importantly – bankrupts. Hamburg, 358; Klefeker, 3: 288–92; Hans Walther Lehr, *Das Bürgerrecht im hamburgischen Staate* (Hamburg: Berngruber & Henning, 1919); Geert Seelig, *Die geschichtliche Entwicklung der hamburgischen Bürgerschaft und der hamburgischen Notabeln* (Hamburg: Gräfe, 1900), 95; Jürgen Bolland, *Die hamburgische Bürgerschaft in alter und neuer Zeit* (Hamburg: Auerdruck, 1959), 20; Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge*, 152–4.

⁹⁷ *Hamburgs Verfassung und Verwaltung*, 1: 14–15; Friedrich Voigt, *Beiträge zur hamburgischen Verwaltungsgeschichte*, vol. 1: *Bericht von 1644 mit Vorschlägen für die städtischen Verwaltung, insbesondere durch Ersparen an den Besoldungen der Beamten und Angestellten* and vol. 2: *Der Verkauf, später das Verpachten städtischer Dienststellen in Hamburg, 1684–1810* (Hamburg: Gräfe & Sillem, 1910–11, 1918). A list of purchasable or leasable offices is found in Heß, *Hamburg*, 3: 431–2.

as Amsterdam postmasters existed. While in Amsterdam, an especially strong burgomaster could ply his connections and be repeatedly re-elected, he did not hold that office for life as did Hamburg Bürgermeisters. Indeed, the regents concluded internal agreements among themselves to protect their positions and those of their families while *not* in office by securing the promise of later reselection. This arrangement meant that in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, corruption formed a frequent intra-regent political matter involving the distribution of powers and privilege among the elites and regulating their conduct; in Hamburg, corruption charges usually played out between Senate and Bürgerschaft and involved issues of the city's political structure, its constitution, and the rights of political participation. Equally true is that the structures of the powerful governing councils in each city molded political culture.

Differences between citizens and various types of non-citizens pertained in Hamburg as elsewhere and the second group possessed few or no political or civic rights. Hamburg citizens were Bürger; those inhabitants of the city who were not citizens, nor eligible for citizenship, became denizens (*Schutzverwandten*) or entered into one of several so-called alien contracts (*Fremdenkontrakte*) with the city. The major determinants of citizenship were birth, religion, and economic status. Generally, citizenship with political privileges pertained solely to those of Lutheran confession. Most Christians could acquire one or another form of limited citizenship which gave them the right to settle, marry, own property, and do business, but which excluded them from politics. They could not, however, worship publicly. Catholics often attended services in the chapel of the Imperial Resident. Certain advantages caused many residents to remain aliens rather than becoming citizens even when eligible; one did not, for instance, have to serve in the militia nor was one financially penalized for leaving the city permanently as were citizens.⁹⁸

Nonetheless, not all citizens were created alike. Despite the myth perpetuated by many Hamburg boosters, that in Hamburg "we have no nobles, no patricians, no slaves, no, not even subjects. All true Hamburgs belong to and acknowledge only one class, that of burgher, nothing more and nothing less," differences pertained.⁹⁹ There were three major classes: Small Citizens, Large Citizens, and Propertied Citizens. Each group received a very unequal share of political power and civic position. As we have seen, the dominant birds in this pecking order were the Propertied Citizens. Generally, only they were eligible to appear in the Bürgerschaft, hold political office, and aspire to the highest civic posts. Political strife in the seventeenth century in Hamburg often brewed up over conflicting ideas about just who was entitled to attend convocations of the Bürgerschaft.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Klefeker, 272–319; Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge*, 187–8. For a lucid discussion of the situation, especially concerning religious minorities, see Whaley, *Religious Toleration*, 11–13 and Driedger, *Obedient*.

⁹⁹ Johann Carl Daniel Curio quoted in Schramm, *Hamburg, ein Sonderfall*, 15–16.

¹⁰⁰ Klefeker, 3: 288–92.

Other economic distinctions divided Large from Small Citizens and here the concept of a “citizen’s livelihood” (*bürgerliche Nahrung*) proved determinant. A citizen’s livelihood included all forms of commercial activity “in distinction to the scholarly professions,” and included, besides commerce on a large scale, retailing, skilled or artisanal trades, tavern keeping, and even some forms of peddling.¹⁰¹ Further legal distinctions set Large Citizens apart from Small, although these blurred over time. The purchase price of Large Citizenship was substantially higher and prohibitive for many. Traditionally, the amount of business a man did determined the difference and mandated who must, for instance, purchase the Large rather than the Small Citizenship. According to the Recess of 1603, for instance, all merchants “who engage in substantial trade, or who run a public warehouse” had to become Large Citizens. Those with just “an ordinary employment, such as retailing or tavern-keeping” need not.¹⁰²

On the bottom rung of inhabitants who enjoyed a legal bond with the city rested the denizens. All “day laborers, nonguilded craftsmen, publicans, sailors, peddlers, valets, and others [practicing] petty professions,” as well as manual laborers and domestic servants could become denizens and thus be spared the costs of citizenship. Each new denizen received a certificate attesting his status and giving him permission to settle and work in the city as well as to marry. Although such people were not allowed to practice a citizen’s livelihood, all other employment lay open to them. They were taxed but freed from serving in the militia.¹⁰³ Legally, the denizens had no civic or political role in the city, but that does not mean that their presence and, at times, even their actions, did not also shape Hamburg’s political culture.

The character of civic office: honorary or professional?

One aspect of political life inherent in the above discussion, and not yet directly addressed, concerns the extent to which citizens assumed civic or political office in a voluntary manner and the degree to which such posts formed an income for the men who held them: Were they in short a *broodwinning* or *Nahrung*, that is, a livelihood? Or, did citizens assume offices out of a sense of civic duty and not

¹⁰¹ S.v. “Nahrung (bürgerliche) in Zedler; “Nahrung” in Krünitz; Klefeker, 12: 439, 442; Christian Ludwig Griesheim, *Verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage des Tractats: Die Stadt Hamburg in ihrem politischen, öconomischen und sittlichen Zustande, nebst Nachträgen zu diesem Tractate und Beyträgen zu der Abhandlung: Anmerckungen und Zugaben über den Tractat: Die Stadt Hamburg, welche selbigen ebenfalls verbessern und gewisser machen* (Hamburg: Drese, 1760), 110–25.

¹⁰² Klefeker, 2: 272–319.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12: 442. The 1712 *Hauptrezeß* (Cap. 1, Par. 3) laid down the guidelines for Schutzverwandten; reprinted in Ernst Bartels (ed.), *Neuer Abdruck der vier Haupt-Grundgesetze der Hamburgischen Verfassung* (Hamburg: Campe, 1823). See also StAHbg, Senat Cl. VII Lit Db Nr. 8 vol. 6 and “Extract. Prot. extrajud. Senat die Designation der Schutzverwandtschaften betreffend,” 5 January 1720 in *Sammlung*, 2: 295.

principally for financial gain? “Government by amateurs” was what Germans called *ehrenamtlich*, that is, honorary, voluntary, and mostly unrecompensed. For many commentators, the assumption of a civic office out of a sense of civic responsibility, rather than in hopes of profit, formed a hallmark and a guarantee of a vigorous republican spirit. What did it mean if such positions had over the course of time become overwhelmingly the province of professional, or professional-like, administrators or proto-bureaucrats? Here, too, one must consider an issue familiar to most early modernists: venality or the sale of offices. Venality concerns us again in [Chapter 3](#), which examines in closer detail how politics was done in each of these three cities and the bedeviled historical concept of corruption. At the very least, however, the framework of venality needs to be explored here as an integral part of the structure of government in each city and, perhaps obviously, as a way to understand to what extent a civic office was an *income* and an *occupation*.

Government in neither Amsterdam, nor Antwerp, nor Hamburg can be considered very democratic, although democracy hardly formed a critical attribute of a classical republican system.¹⁰⁴ Even cities with oligarches rarely blocked all pathways to the political top for newcomers. Moreover, the parishes and wards, the guilds and the militias, offered ways for even rather ordinary citizens to engage in civic life. Confraternities and charitable associations provided other venues to express civic virtue. Another way to be involved in government was to purchase an office. The number of venal offices open to people at many social levels was great. Many were sold and many were distributed as patronage plums; the opportunities ranged in the thousands. Acquiring them invested people with a stake in government and governing, to say nothing of allowing them to reap sometimes substantial monetary rewards.

Each of these three cities differed in how they distributed such lesser jobs. The allotment of this wide range of minor posts varied in law as well as in practice. The numbers available fluctuated significantly but were always strikingly large. In Hamburg, provisions made in 1684 specified several hundred posts to be leased or sold to the highest bidder. In Amsterdam, during his quarter-year in office, each presiding burgomaster exercised an exclusive right to name “all offices of lesser weight.” Of “lesser weight” they may have been but many were strikingly remunerative. Although the burgomaster usually received an acknowledgment for such a “gift,” positions were generally neither sold nor leased outright. The situation differed considerably in Antwerp where, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it had become common for those who occupied an office to pay a “taxe d’office.” Many posts in all three cities could be, and were, carried out by substitutes, a modality that fabricated yet another layer of patronage.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Boumans, 38, 40.

¹⁰⁵ For Hamburg, see the list in Heß, *Topographisch-politisch-historische Beschreibung* 2: 331–78; on Amsterdam, C. H. Theodoor Bussemaker, “Lijst van ambten en officiën ter begeving

When filtered through nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography, conventions of gifting and systems of venality emit a rather strong stench of corruption as well as being viewed as antithetical to the preservation of republican virtue and civic liberties alike. Writing in 1949, Koenraad W. Swart argued that sale of office was “not just another form of corruption,” rather it bore “serious political implications” that reached far beyond a sense of outraged morality.¹⁰⁶ Recent scholarship has done much to revise that view and contextualize the process. Venality was, after all, hardly corrupt when it *was* the system. Thus, while disadvantages to selling or leasing office existed and have received perhaps the most attention in the scholarly literature, there were advantages to be harvested. Moreover, most systems of sale did not merely knock down places to the highest bidder. Relevant ordinances specifically distinguished between posts that could be simply sold, and which generally were of the lowest sort, having the least income and demanding the least skill, and those for which expertise, education, and experience were mandatory prerequisites. Candidates for the latter had to put down a deposit to ensure their probity and exactitude.

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians assiduously identified, and almost unanimously condemned, the abuses venality nurtured. Selling office as a way to raise government revenues could easily, it was claimed, foster the pointless multiplication of officials who thus removed themselves from a productive economic cycle, allow for the employment and promotion of incompetents, and feed the greed of office-holders for emoluments to help them recoup their investments or jack up their profits. The ledger, however, recorded credits as well. First, venality promoted social mobility by allowing more people to attain positions in government or to secure incomes, and also gave them a vested interest in preserving stability. Second, when rules permitted office-holders to bequeath posts, families could, over generations, develop great expertise and competence in the execution of vital tasks. Third, purchase protected one from arbitrary dismissal from office, thus producing something like an independent corps of officials that, while hardly a bureaucracy or civil service of the modern kind, often created a well-oiled administrative machine. Finally, the public sale of office had the added benefit of removing the distribution of offices from the realm of political favoritism and intrigue and supposedly generated a much desired transparency.¹⁰⁷

If we recognize that mixed and sometimes praiseworthy motives led to the introduction of venal systems, we should not go too far in the other direction

staande van burgemeesteren van Amsterdam in 1749,” *BMHG* 28 (1907): 474–518; Antwerp, Boumans, 246–52 and René Boumans, “Het verhandelen der stedelijke officiën te Antwerpen in de XVIIIe eeuw,” *BGN* 3, 1–2 (1948): 42–68.

¹⁰⁶ Koenraad W. Swart, *Sale of Offices in the Seventeenth Century* (The Hague: M. Nijhof, 1949), 1.

¹⁰⁷ Doyle, *Venality*, 319–21; Boumans, 259–60; Swart, *Sale of Offices*, 1.

and ignore the problems it undoubtedly nurtured. Even when rules stipulated that offices could not merely be auctioned off but rather required proof of honesty and competence, the best candidates did not always triumph and judging skill was no easy task. Choices often had to be made between several equally qualified competitors. There were always winners and losers and the latter frequently perceived their loss as a matter of preference not merit. In short, the policy could be opaque as well as transparent and always allowed fiddling. If venality could be cast as a reform, as it was at important historical junctures, not everyone accepted that logic. Those who held office and stood to lose it, or had to repurchase it, raised objections and these crossed with quite legitimate, or legitimate-sounding, complaints about why the sale of some offices proved inappropriate and misconceived.

In Hamburg, for example, the Building Commission (*Baubhof*) carried out all public works projects. Set up in the late Middle Ages, it repeatedly rubbed the Bürgerschaft the wrong way by submitting “extravagant bills.” Construction then, as now, presented great opportunities for graft and corruption and the Bürgerschaft viewed the Building Commission as a giant money-laundering scheme run for the benefit of senators and their cronies.¹⁰⁸ The director’s position became purchasable in 1684. The incumbent protested, however, arguing that it was unfair to expect him to re-acquire his post. He deeply resented the implication that he was guilty of misconduct. He advanced good, and by no means totally self-serving, reasons for why the job should not be set on the auction block. Among other points, however, he raised political, or rather constitutional ones. “Here, unlike in Holland,” he maintained, “not every job is free and the incumbent [of such a post] is responsible to all other offices. Moreover, [such a sale] is not compatible with our city’s constitution.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ [August Wygand], “Kurtze Vorstellung Eines Zwischen einen Hamburgischen Doctor Bürgerhold genannt/ Und einem Handwercks-Mann Freyheit-lieb gehaltenen Gesprächs/ In welchen nicht nur das jetzige Hamburgische Elend und Schlacverey betrachtet/ sondern auch der Bürgerey guter Taht mitgetheilet wird/ wie Sie sich aus solchen ihren Elend loß machen/ und wie Sie sich anitzo/ da die meisten des Rahts wider bessere Veranstaltung mit händen und Füßen streben/ und denen Gemeinen-Guts Dieben mit Gewalt überhelffen und die Diebes-Gruben nicht untersuchen lassen wollen/ zu verhalten und ihre Wolfahrt feste setzen können: Denen redlichen Zeithero schlaffenden Hamburg Bürgern zum Besten und Auffmunterung nach geendigtem Gespräch entworffen und zum Druck befördert. Von erwehnten Gottlieb Bürgerhold Jurium Utriusque Doctor. Gedruckt/ 1697.” [unpag.], in StAHbg, omnibus vol. 208, no. 40; “Die Wahre Uhrsache Der Hamburgische Unruhe/ Worinnen nur mit einem einigen Exempel gewiesen wird/ daß weder die Löbl. Bürgerschaft/ Wider die Ehrbahren Aempter/ Sondern die Praedominirende FACTIONES Die einige Quelle aller der bisherigen Unordnungen gewesen seyn. Gedruckt im Monat May/ 1704.” [unpag.] in *ibid.*, omnibus vol. 212, no. 40.

¹⁰⁹ “Kurtze Warhaffte DEMONSTRATION von dem Dienste und Hause Des hiesigen Baumeisters/ und Was es damit eigentlich vor eine Bewandtnuß habe. Zu jedermanns Nachricht im

Thus, a venal system, even one that promised greater fairness and transparency in transactions, never shook itself free from the suspicion of corruption. Those who sought offices understood, appreciated, and worked within the dynamics of elaborate and extended patronage–clientage systems. They accepted the necessity of gifts and even what we would today call bribes to smooth their attainment of a desired goal, whether such *baksheesh* came in the form of money, considerations, political support, merchandise, or sexual favors. When normal pathways clogged or led nowhere, when a gift went unacknowledged or a favor unreturned, then seething resentment fed anger and charges of corruption arose.

Reform initiatives proposed the sale or lease of office as a way to increase municipal revenues as well as to prevent the capricious distribution of offices by circumventing these pitfalls of favoritism, nepotism, and corruption. In Hamburg, for example, major positions in the government were not sold; one pillar of Hamburg republicanism rested on its dependence on voluntarism to fill most important offices.¹¹⁰ No city could function without some mercenary officials, however. In Hamburg, until the late seventeenth century the appointment of “most [of these] lay entirely in the power of the Senate,” and, it was charged, senators handed them out to their hangers-on. This practice festered into a running sore and became a major element in confrontations between Senate and *Bürgerschaft* over constitutional issues. The *Bürgerschaft* complained that the Senate had pledged in earlier recesses (1483, 1529, and 1603) to distribute offices only to “pious, competent and knowledgeable citizens.” Instead the Senate “had invariably nominated their tutors, lackeys, coachmen, wet-nurses, and maids to such posts and [usually] not without accepting gifts, presents, and money.” The senior *Bürgermeister* held a number of such positions in his power and, for example, in July 1684 Johann Schulte presented one such post to his cook as a wedding present.¹¹¹

At the same time, the *Bürgerschaft* blamed the Senate’s practices in assigning offices for the desolate condition of the urban treasury. The major revision in the distribution of offices in 1684 sought to curtail the Senate’s right to do so arbitrarily and from reaping illicit profits from these clandestine and offensive transactions. A regular scale of prices was laid down. In 1685, the jailer paid 2900 marks for his office and received an annual salary of 456 marks plus fees. The city’s executioner also purchased his place, although “this post is generally not publicly offered and has usually remained the possession of the

öffentlichen Druck herausgegeben. HAMBURG, Gedruckt bey Conrad Neumann/ E. E. Hoch-Weis. Rahts Buchdr.” [n.d. December 1706 according to Lochau] [unpag.] in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol. 213, no. 78.

¹¹⁰ Mary Lindemann, “Voluntarism in Social Welfare and Urban Government: The Case of Hamburg, 1700–1799,” *JUH* 36 (2010): 316–31.

¹¹¹ Schulte, *Briefe*, 186.

same family.” Yet each executioner paid anew despite his inherited right. In 1686, the position cost the substantial sum of 6000 marks; it had a fixed salary of 600 marks annually, plus various extras such as 43 marks for burying each suicide.¹¹²

The situation differed substantially in Amsterdam where burgomasters distributed minor offices quite openly in return for favors or influence. These many offices were, however, neither publicly advertised nor sold outright. Here, too, posts were brokered in return for a gratification or taxed with an annual fee. Outside of Holland, however, municipal governments often sold offices publicly for the general benefit of the urban treasury and as a way to prevent the magistracy from pocketing the often considerable sums involved. In eighteenth-century Amsterdam, however, pressure mounted to introduce the sale of posts in order to prevent the continuance of the system whereby burgomasters controlled access to positions, some minor, some not so. The public sale of office thus formed one major demand of Dutch popular protest in 1747 and 1748.¹¹³

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Antwerp, too, the way in which offices were distributed repeatedly incited charges of corruption. Here, however, major urban functionaries, such as the pensionary and the Council’s secretaries, typically bought their offices. Unlike the system that developed in France, the holders could neither bequeath, nor inherit, nor transfer them. They did not become family property but rather remained completely under the control of the magistracy. Thus, Antwerp apparently avoided the development of an entrenched and calcified corps of officials.¹¹⁴

Over the course of the sixteenth and, more forcefully, in the seventeenth centuries, the system expanded and, perhaps inevitably, prices rose. By the late seventeenth century, the effects of the general economic malaise had made themselves palpably felt. In financial distress, Antwerp’s magistracy petitioned the central government for a concession (*octroy*) to be allowed to sell offices openly. The resulting 1693 regulation vividly depicted a grievous state in urban finances: “we find it impossible to compensate municipal workers and teachers, [to pay] our fees, and [to cover] our other debts.” An appendix to this plea detailed the new costs of offices, raising the fee for the Second Pensionary, for example, from *f*2000 to *f*3000. Similarly, a secretarial post now went for *f*6000 instead of *f*4000 and that of the First Pensionary for *f*5000 instead of *f*2000. A very long list of other offices followed, elevating prices for virtually all.¹¹⁵

The renewed financial crisis of the late 1730s resulted in a renewed search for ways to remedy increasingly dire fiscal distress. Again, the sale of offices seemed the perfect solution and, in 1738, a new regulation divided purchasable

¹¹² Heß, *Topographisch-politisch Beschreibung*, 2: 330–1.

¹¹³ Israel, 1067–78. ¹¹⁴ Boumans, 246–48; Boumans, “Verhandelen.”

¹¹⁵ *Octroy van syne Koninklycke Maiesteyt, Tot belatinghe vande Officien binnen de stad Antwerpen, den 7 Julii Anno 1693* (Antwerp: Knobbaert, 1693), in FA, PK 1480.

positions into four distinct categories; significantly the Broad Council had drafted it as a measure to restore the health of urban finances and prevent arbitrary distribution of posts.¹¹⁶ High offices that required a special competence, such as the advanced degree in law necessary to become pensionary, remained untouched and continued to be filled within the traditional framework of sale and purchase. A second category comprised a number of “positions of trust” and included the head of treasury, the senior collector of the excise, the concierges of the city hall and house of correction, and the like. These posts “the magistrates should give only to the most qualified [person] among the three highest bidders.” Most offices, however, fell into the two lowest categories. One sort went to the highest bidder with no further restrictions, as did the second with the understanding, however, that a substitute would take on the real work because of the special skills or knowledge they demanded. The official owner then compensated his subordinate. The trade in offices under these conditions soon became one of the most productive and reliable sources of income for the city. It also substantially inflated the price of office.¹¹⁷

Sale of office in Antwerp under the then prevailing conditions apparently generated few serious problems: admittedly prices rose, but the number of offices actually declined. Moreover, in the eighteenth century, when considerable criticism centered on the corrupt distribution of offices by burgomasters in Amsterdam, no similarly heated polemic troubled Antwerp. Later in the century, when a push to abolish or greatly restrict the sale of offices actually developed, it came from the central government. Even here, the discussion registered not a sense of social injustice but rather a pressing concern for fiscal certitude.¹¹⁸ The urban magistracy in Antwerp resisted the change and presented an interesting argument in defense of a system that had long prevailed: the sale of office made it possible for anyone to obtain a post and the purchase cost, if high, actually attracted far better candidates than would otherwise be the case. René Boumans rejected this argument as “dubious.”¹¹⁹ It does sound suspiciously like a self-serving defense of a cushy system that produced, relatively painlessly, an almost inexhaustible source of income.

But perhaps we should not dismiss the logic too quickly as a mere defense of entrenched privilege. Its advocates intended creating greater transparency in the allotment of offices by advertising and thus opening posts to all (everyone with the necessary funds, of course). Such a method would incorporate more men into the business of governing and provide them with secure incomes.

¹¹⁶ “Octroy pour le vente des offices accordé à la ville d’Anvers par son Altesse Serenissime Madame L’Archiduchesse D’Austriche Gouvernante Generale des Pays Bas en date 21 d’Octobre 1738,” in FA, PK 1482. PK 1482 also contains a list of all offices for sale and the conditions under which they were offered. A “Register van alle de Offitien vercocht door de Stadt Antwerpen van 1739–1793” can be found in FA, PK 1481.

¹¹⁷ For a list of the offices sold and prices from 1738 to 1773, see Mertens/Torfs, Suppl.: 209–26; a longer list through 1788 is found in FA, PK 7021.

¹¹⁸ Boumans, 246–51, 260–1. ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 260–1.

Typical was the advertisement placed in the *Gazette van Antwerpen* in December 1736 that announced the availability of a lease on the wine and brandy excise. Another notice, published in April 1743, specified the sale conditions for a series of newly vacant offices. These included, “due to the death of xxx,” a captaincy, a headmanship, overseers for the “Friday market,” and a janitor or gatekeeper post. The list illustrates the range of offices and demonstrates the variety of possibilities for purchases, large and small, and reveals the opportunities for a relatively broad cross-section of the citizenry to invest in, and become invested in, the commune’s political and economic life.¹²⁰

Of the three cities, Antwerp therefore possessed the most venal system in legal terms, having established a clearly regulated, hierarchical, extensive, and mercenary procedure for the distribution of offices through sale. Did that also mean that office-holding in Antwerp was essentially a *broodwinning*, that is, a livelihood? Were those involved professional governors? Or did the principle of voluntarism, *ehrenamtliche* governing, and political amateurism remain important in theory if perhaps increasingly vestigial in reality? Clearly in Antwerp by the eighteenth century, and probably considerably earlier, government was not, or was no longer, honorary, unsalaried (or mostly so), and voluntary or amateur. Rather, as in Amsterdam but not in Hamburg, offices in Antwerp proved attractively lucrative, and formed useful or even necessary, parts of the income of these who chose to govern. In short, a more or less professional corps of magistrates evolved. In Antwerp this tendency, perhaps because of long-term economic torpor, appears more pronounced than in Amsterdam and far more so than in Hamburg. To what extent we want to refer to this as a “professionalization” of governing and administration is debatable, but some characteristics of professionalization pertained in Antwerp as in Amsterdam, if considerably less so in Hamburg. Clearly a full-blown amateurism in government no longer existed in most Brabant cities, including Antwerp, and some were quick to argue that its lack also denoted the decline of civic republicanism.

The first reason why government by amateurs tended to disappear in these centuries, or at least was attenuated, lay with the criticality of a legal degree for making one’s way in the realm of government. That rule held for all three cities as it did for virtually all early modern European governments. The second is the long-term presence of men in various offices, sometimes held simultaneously, each of which provided incomes that when pieced together allowed the possessor to attain or maintain a suitable economic and social position. All major office-holders in Antwerp came from something like a regent milieu and remained tightly bound to it.¹²¹ Moreover, “a pronounced social mixing [existed] . . . behind the magistracy and the leading figures of the urban administration” who had purchased their posts. This cheek-by-jowl relationship, however, did not characterize functionaries who had purchased lesser

¹²⁰ *Gazette van Antwerpen*, 14 December 1736; “Waerschowinghe” in FA, PK 2849.

¹²¹ Degryse, “Stadsadel,” 467.

offices and none of these possessed a clear familial link with the magistrates. In Antwerp, although less so in Amsterdam and not at all in Hamburg, office-holding in the urban administration could provide a jumping-off point for a later, more glorious, and profitable, career in the central administration in Brabant or Brussels. Jan Vequemans, who gave up his office as Second Burgomaster in August 1673, became a Brabant councillor.¹²²

Sheer economic survival was, for those who held major posts, usually not an issue. Office could, however, spell the difference between a good income and fitting lifestyle and ones that were not. In the first half of the eighteenth century in Antwerp, for instance, the scion of a respected family, Gaspar Joseph van Horne, was groomed for an administrative career early in life by his mother. She sent him to Leuven to study law, thus qualifying him for the office of City Secretary procured for him in 1714 for *f*10,000. Thereafter he held one or another urban office, both honorary and mercenary, for some thirty-two years serving as secretary but as also as schepen, headman of the citizenry, and director of the orphanage. Horne, however, never grew into a major political animal; apparently, "his career [was] not an unmitigated success." Until he inherited a considerable sum in the early 1740s, the holding of office, and the money gained from it, however, secured his place among well-to-do Antwerpeners.¹²³

As this story suggests, compensation for non-venal offices rarely constituted a satisfactory or sufficient income for those who aspired to major or even middling social status. The office of schepen, which paid *f*547.5 annually in the seventeenth century and some *f*800–900 in the next, formed "no real occupation," even if one allows that *income* totaled twice the salary. Some, such as one burgomaster candidate in 1772, who was "burdened with a large family and possessing small means but much integrity," clearly needed the money. Actual financial returns prove hard to calculate especially as schepenen concurrently pursued other jobs, especially the jurists among them. Fortunately, one man, the lawyer, A. Anselmo, schepen in 1646, kept detailed notes. In money, he received *f*1126, but he also got half a sheep at Christmas and a great deal of fish throughout the year. From his law practice, he earned *f*462, making his annual monetary take about *f*1540. He, as was expected of all schepenen, drew most of his income from personal funds and properties. The duties of schepen, however, could be difficult for active traders to undertake; they ran the risk of neglecting their own business and suffering financial setbacks. This unhappy outcome affected at least one, the wool-dealer, H. Hellin, schepen since 1763; he declared bankruptcy in 1779. For the many schepenen who would never

¹²² Buyten, "Bureaucratie," 521, 523; Boumans, 276, 307. The court-clerk Zeckers was "named to the Great Council of Mechelen" in January 1692. Valckenisse and Rylant, "Kronijk," 124, 263.

¹²³ Karel Degryse, "Ridder Gaspar Joseph van Horne (1688–1748), Antwerps stadssecretaris, schepen en rentenier: Een socio-economische benadering van een loopbann in stadsdienst," *Bijdragen geschiedenis hertogdom Brabant* 65 (1982): 109–26.

attain, or perhaps even aspire to, a higher post, such as burgomaster, buying the post of secretary or pensionary significantly improved their incomes and elevated their social status.¹²⁴

Thus many members of the magistracy found it useful, or perhaps even necessary, to purchase a functionary position. Several advantages adhered to such posts. Unlike selection as a schepen, for example, a fixed position in the administration offered a steady income and appreciably higher salary. Especially for those schepenen who recognized that they had little or no possibility, or no desire, of becoming either a Second or a First Burgomaster, purchased posts proved extremely attractive. In the seventeenth century, for instance, some forty-one men abandoned their seats in the schepen college, but either remained in the city's service (eighteen) or found places in the central government (twenty); three turned to the religious life. Two (for example, Jan Damant, from 1588 to 1610, and Lodeward Clarisse, from 1630 to 1663), were appointed sheriffs by the governor of the Spanish Netherlands. Several others received positions in the Great Council of Mechelen, among them Willem van Halmale in 1664 and Steven Cornelis Janssens in 1694. More obtained seats in the Council of Brabant in Brussels, and so on.¹²⁵

Professional office-holding in the early modern context often meant that some men and their families could achieve a stranglehold on certain higher offices. Such constituted professionalization in the context of these polities. A man built a political career by rotating through specific offices and by avoiding being out of office for an appreciable period of time, without necessarily separating himself from mercantile pursuits entirely. The regents in the Dutch cities and, of course, in Amsterdam, came to enjoy just this kind of monopoly. Was the same sort of oligarchy typical of Antwerp or Hamburg and, if it existed, did it provoke protests against the breaking of older communal and older republican traditions as it frequently did in Amsterdam and, sporadically, in Hamburg? In Antwerp's case, two other factors complicate the picture and assumed greater weight there than in either Amsterdam or Hamburg: the quite strikingly large percentage of noble magistrates and the much greater presence and more frequent intervention of the central government from Brussels.

The existence of a central government, even a relatively weak one, meant that more restraints hedged the power of the magistracy in Antwerp than in either Amsterdam or Hamburg. Still, its members retained considerable control over internal urban politics. The make-up of that magistracy and the ability of individuals, families, and groups to manipulate its power remained a critical element in Antwerp's political and civic life. This magistracy, however, remained relatively open, or at least no small clique of families or a virtually impenetrable and legally fixed patrician group dominated it.¹²⁶ The magistracy in Antwerp,

¹²⁴ *Antwerpen, 17de*, 11; Boumans, 216–17, 277; Degryse, “Stadsadel,” 471.

¹²⁵ *Antwerpen, 17de*, 7; Boumans, 277–8.

¹²⁶ Burke, *Venice and Amsterdam*, 25–7, 32.



FIGURE 2 Portrait of Alexandre della Faille (1589–1653), Secretary of the City of Antwerp, by Antoon van Dyck

unlike the regents in Amsterdam, for instance, apparently demonstrated less overlap in blood relations, at least in the eighteenth century, although considerable intermarriage existed among the schepenen families. Boumans, for instance, concluded that “the number of typical magistrate families is too small to conclude that they were able to monopolize” major offices for themselves.¹²⁷ There were, however, exceptions. For the seventeenth century, one can point to the careers of men like Hendrik van Halmale and Melchior Haecx. Between 1628 and 1679, Halmale served thirty times as schepen, twelve years in the very powerful position of First Burgomaster, and three years as First Treasurer. Haecx’s profile remained lower, but he, too, could look back on a long and respectable career: from 1636 to 1677, he always sat in a governing council in one capacity or another, serving eighteen years as schepen and two decades as pensionary. This longevity in office and ability to concentrate power, however, characterized only a handful of families in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Antwerp. The Della Faille-Waarlooses, for instance, placed men in the magistracy for five successive generations. One of these, Jakob (1735–1808), served without break from 1763 onwards, not only as schepen but also in the more impressive and powerful roles of Second or First Burgomaster.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Boumans, 205. Boumans only looked at relationships between blood relatives with the same family names. The very difficult investigation of relationships in greater degrees of distance remained, he argued, “work yet unattempted” (205n1). To my knowledge, there are still few studies that have attempted the time-consuming task of record linking and family reconstruction.

¹²⁸ *Antwerpen*, 17de, 8; Boumans, 180.

What remains unclear is whether contemporaries viewed this magistracy as relatively open or closed or, for that matter, whether they even thought in those terms. As in Amsterdam and Hamburg, jurists and merchants, or those from merchant families and backgrounds, dominated. In all places, the presence of merchants in the magistracy was considered valuable, indeed indispensable even when the numerical representation was slight. So when the Antwerp banker J. de Broëta in 1786 sought to avoid office, the magistracy resisted, arguing that mercantile expertise and an unparalleled knowledge of mercantile life allowed for “sounder judgement” in many affairs and, moreover, would prevent the “chicanery” that greatly prejudiced urban commerce.¹²⁹

The apparent lack of a professional corps of paid proto-bureaucrats in Amsterdam and Hamburg needs closer examination before we conclude that their governments remained fully voluntarist or *ehrenamtlich*. In Amsterdam, regents once active as merchants had, over the course of the mid to late seventeenth century, become full-time governors; a development that the contracts of correspondence solidified. If the Antwerp magistrate elite remained relatively accessible to new men, the Amsterdam regents proved less so although not as tightly closed as the Venetian patriciate nor totally impenetrable. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the regents’ circle had become less permeable than earlier.¹³⁰ Still, at the very least, the façade of voluntary government persisted and the apparent retreat from merchant life proved far less definitive than often assumed. The value of the merchant presence and a mercantile perspective remained desirable and not only rhetorically. Despite the existence of mechanisms for preserving careers over long periods in Amsterdam, shifts did occur and men rotated out of office or were unceremoniously dumped. Sometimes these changes of fortune proved of relatively short duration but, in the interim, those on the outs often returned to their roots in commerce. Moreover, even family members who governed remained involved in business if only as silent partners or investors. If some eighteenth-century regents tended to be “substantially divorced from commercial life and living from the passive income of financial assets,” that trait did not describe them all nor necessarily prevent them from taking pride in a mercantile sensibility and heritage.¹³¹

Hamburg boasted of its exclusively *ehrenamtliche* governing style; its government by amateurs. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, voluntarism

¹²⁹ Quoted in Boumans, 203.

¹³⁰ Burke, *Venice and Amsterdam*; Frijhoff/Prak-2, 145, 148–9.

¹³¹ De Vries and Van der Woude, in *First*, while not wishing to “rehabilitate” the traditional political reputation of the “Periwig Age” regents as “self-satisfied” rentiers and office-holders, nonetheless argue that it is necessary to place “the regents and rentiers in a broader context” and further suggest that their position of “progressive economic marginalization . . . probably had less to do with differences in their personal qualities than with deeper structures and macropolitical conditions that were not easily changed” (698). Israel, 1016, repeats the traditional view that, in the eighteenth century, “most of the wealthy [including regents] . . . were men who had no active economic role.”

was its most cherished governmental principle and political attribute. Policy making devolved only on men who held voluntary or honorary offices. Voluntary did not equate cleanly with “volunteer,” however. Nor should eighteenth-century voluntarism be comprehended, as one does today, as “voluntary cooperation,” that is, as something separate and fully distinct from the actions and organizations of state. Voluntarism was anchored in Hamburg’s constitution; it stipulated that anyone selected for the office of subdeacon, deacon, alderman, senator, Bürgermeister, or any other *Ehrenamt* could not escape the honor. Refusal to serve could result in loss of citizenship or even banishment. Only age and illness freed a designee. Dispensations were rare as were requests for them and probably the difficulty of attaining one accounted for the paucity of petitions for exceptions.¹³² As we have seen, the city carefully supervised non-honorary, that is, salaried offices. While the number of these paid positions was not insignificant, their holders never engaged in policy making nor were they ever equated with the more prestigious *ehrenamtliche* posts.¹³³

Within the *Ehrenämter*, honoraria, carefully distinguished from salaries, benefited only the most demanding and time-consuming. Members of the Senate and the aldermen received *douceurs* and some tax exemptions.¹³⁴ Hamburg, therefore, staffed the high end, and almost the whole middling rank, of government offices – from the parish to the treasury to the courts – with unpaid non-professionals, although, as everywhere, the possession of a legal degree had become a *sine qua non* for some posts. Generally, it was believed that those who served for money proved not only more corruptible but also less able to make the impartial and prudent decisions that promoted the good of the community as a whole. Instead, pious, honorable, energetic, and, perhaps above all, prosperous men served out of commitment to God and their community and best understood how to preserve civic peace and further communal welfare.

It was also expected that such governors would seamlessly stitch together their private and public lives and acknowledge no difference between their own good and the good of the commune; each secured the other. Good government in Hamburg supposedly rested on just these pillars of the community whose willingness to sacrifice their time, their leisure, and occasionally their fortunes sustained the whole and underwrote Hamburg republicanism. Their wealth

¹³² See “Varia, verschiedene gewährte und abgeschlagene Gesuche um Dispensation von bürgerlichen (und kirchlich-bürgerlichen) Offizien betreffend, 1727–1807,” StAHbg, Senat Cl. VII Lit. Bc Nr. 13 fasc. 1 and the very short list of resignations from the Senat in StAHbg “Varia, Senat Cl. VII Lit. Ab Nr. 3 vol. 5.

¹³³ Buek, *Oberalten*, 406–08; Voigt, *Beiträge*, vol. 2; Westphalen, *Verfassung und Verwaltung*, I: 27–32.

¹³⁴ “Rath- und Bürgerschuß,” 7 February 1695; Art. XIX of Principal Recess (*Haupt-Receß*) of 1712; “Rath- und Bürgerschuß,” 22 September 1712. In 1767 the honorarium for the Oberalten was increased to 1250 Mk. Bco. and, in 1806, to 2000 Mk. Bco. Westphalen, *Verfassung und Verwaltung*, I: 219.

was believed to ensure probity in office; their reputations to prevent the abuse of authority. Repeatedly, observers found in this system where “citizens govern citizens” the surest guarantees of civic harmony and liberties. If the real situation glowed less rosy, contemporaries and many historians praised it as able to avoid the rampant and destructive corruption they saw in every monarchy and even in fellow republics, like Amsterdam. In Hamburg, voluntary government formed a safely banked middle road between the tyranny of absolutism and the anarchy of mob rule.

Few people knew the ins and outs of Hamburg’s constitution better than Jonas Ludwig von Heß, the author of a detailed and highly informative Hamburg topography. Writing at the end of the eighteenth century, Heß explained, and idealized, the ways in which Hamburg balanced administrative demands with sacred tenets of voluntarism and republicanism. “The state of Hamburg,” Heß pointed out, “requires a large number of officials . . . to fulfill its wants, provide its comforts, see to its defense, and demonstrate its majesty, grandeur, and prosperity . . . It needs too many of these to be able to pay them all.” Thus, Hamburg relied on “the patriotic ardor for liberty” secreted in the breasts of citizens. Citizens took up “and conduct[ed] the affairs of government as an honor without [expecting] monetary compensation.” This duty “citizens owe to the free state that nourishes and protects them” and “whose constitution guards their civic rights and property from arbitrary attack.” “Whoever aspires to the rights and pretensions of an [ordinary] Hamburg citizen, must only exercise a [respectable] occupation and be able to maintain himself therein.” But, “whoever strives to be an active citizen (*Staatsbürger*), a participant in, and representative of, the republic, has sacred [and] precious duties, and receives as payment only that most valuable of all feelings”: freedom. Of a Hamburg citizen, “one cannot say that he serves, but also not that he commands. He does not even serve the state for he is the state.” Moreover, Heß went on, “there is scarcely a citizen in Hamburg above the level of laborer or servant who, having once settled here and opened his business, is not almost immediately selected by his fellow citizens to fill a parish office, and so onwards and upwards [he moves] through the civic departments to become a participant in the administration of the police, of justice, of charities, commerce, the treasury, and [eventually] in legislation.” How much better off, Heß argued, was a state tended by free citizens than by “compensated ne’er-do-wells” who hold sinecures and entrust vital civic matters to poorly paid drudges who lacked all stake in the polity or its well-being.¹³⁵ The question was, or had become, how useful such principles continued to be in the changed and changing world of the eighteenth century. Did Heß, writing in the 1790s, merely describe a world that had been lost with a nostalgia that could not retrieve it? Simply put, were the traditions of voluntarism antiquated? Had republics founded on those traditions become obsolete?

¹³⁵ Heß, *Hamburg*, 2: 321–4.

Those questions circle us back to the issue of closed and open elites. Hamburg's governing elite seems to have remained considerably more open than that in either Amsterdam or Antwerp. Admittedly, the same family names often appeared repeatedly in the major councils, but none (alone or in combination) achieved a tight monopoly of office and power. Commanding figures, such as the Bicker brothers, Gillis Valckenier, and Joan Corver in Amsterdam, rarely came to the fore in Hamburg, although it would be foolish to assume that some men did not dominate by the force of their personalities and the power of their positions. The opinions and the actions of long-term members of the Senate, like the syndics Johann Klefeker (who served for fifty years) and Nicolas Matsen, or, in the seventeenth century, the powerful Bürgermeister Heinrich Meurer (who was, however, an apple of discord) and in the late eighteenth century, the Senator and Bürgermeister, Johann Heinrich Bartels, carried considerable weight. At the same time, new men moved in and up, often with astonishing rapidity. Even Hamburg's major governmental positions proved relatively accessible to outsiders. In the seventeenth century, of the 824 men who held an office of political importance, or one that gave entrée to such offices in the future, 218 or over 26 percent were immigrants. Between 1713 and 1815, 20 percent of aldermen were non-natives.¹³⁶ Moreover, the distance between active merchants and governors never gapped, even rhetorically, to the extent that it did in either Antwerp or Amsterdam even if, as we have seen, in both cases the split was either less pronounced or less consequential than has often been maintained.

Prominent families in Hamburg frequently drew their influence from a combination of business and law, mercantile and governing activities. Because more than half of the senators and one of the four Bürgermeisters had to be merchants, the mercantile representation remained important in both word and deed. Admittedly, it appears that the jurist members tended to enter the Senate at an earlier age, serve longer, and probably became more influential, but many merchant-senators and merchant-Bürgermeisters took a back seat to no one. Clever family strategies made the holding of office possible for several members in succeeding generations, as family trees branched into mercantile and legal limbs, with one brother studying law while another ran the business.¹³⁷

Politically active families included the Anckelmanns, Doormanns, Sievekings, Klefekers, and Rentzels. Their generational biographies illustrate how traditions of communal service evolved and how entwined the mercantile, legal, and governing worlds remained in Hamburg. Joachim Anckelmann emigrated from Schwäbisch Hall to Hamburg in the fifteenth century; his son, Tolen, was one of the original aldermen chosen in 1528. During the next three centuries, three other Anckelmanns became aldermen, while five were selected senators and one became a highly influential syndic. Sons and daughters married into

¹³⁶ Reißmann, *Kaufmannschaft*, 236.

¹³⁷ Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 21–2; Lindemann, “Voluntarism.”

other political families and virtually every male Anckelmann engaged in the business of governing. Although the family remained primarily merchants, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many sons and brothers studied law. The Rentzels, too, could by the end of the eighteenth century look back on many years of service to the city. Peter Rentzel, the first of the Hamburg Rentzels, was a senator in the sixteenth century. One son became an alderman and then a senator, while other siblings studied law and became powerful political figures. Here, too, one is struck by the staggered generational pattern of lawyers and merchants that suited them doubly for public office. Yet, the Rentzels remained active in trade and, in the seventeenth century, ranked among the wealthiest families in Hamburg.¹³⁸

Even families well moored in the political world often found themselves superseded by new men and formed political alliances with them to mutual advantage. In 1744, for example, Peter Amsinck reflected proudly that his family was “the largest and most respected” in the city. Through his family connections, he enjoyed the patronage of friends and relatives that helped a man achieve success. A family like the Amsincks exerted enormous political influence through its many members in the Senate and among the aldermen, but also as merchants and businessmen, and as shipbuilders, shippers, and principals in the old and highly regarded firm of Johannes Schuback & Sons. In the mid 1700s, such tightly knit clans remained very important but more and more new men had moved in and up. According to Percy Ernst Schramm, a noted historian and himself the descendant of a venerable Hamburg family, one found “in the leading circles far too many parvenus and newcomers whom one, nolens-volens, met everywhere.” Like nouveaux riches everywhere, they quickly married into the established families and just as expeditiously rooted themselves in Hamburg’s social system. Schramm’s analysis of the workings of social and political mobility in merchant cities is still valid. Then again, as elsewhere, families died out, emigrated for economic reasons, or were destroyed by debts and bankruptcy.¹³⁹

Conclusions

This survey of governmental structures in these three cities underscores the obvious fact that only a relatively small segment of the citizenry in any of them participated fully in political life.¹⁴⁰ It is, however, wrong to reduce

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18–22; Wilhelm Heyden, “Die Familie Anckelmann in Hamburg,” *ZNF* 7 (1925): 273–9; “Rentzel,” *Schriftstellerlexikon*.

¹³⁹ Hildegard von Marchtaler, *Aus Alt-Hamburger Senatorenhäusern: Familienschicksale im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Christians, 1959); Percy E. Schramm, *Neun Generationen: Dreihundert Jahre deutscher “Kulturgeschichte” im Lichte der Schicksale einer Hamburger Bürgerfamilie (1648–1948)* (2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963–4).

¹⁴⁰ Christopher R. Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 5 presents the standard interpretation: “the great majority of any city’s inhabitants never played an part in the community’s political life.”

“participation in political life” solely to a group of men who held, or were eligible to hold, higher offices as members of the schep en college, the vroedschap, or the Senate. Such prepotent political animals exerted more pull than others and also benefited most from their engagement in government, not the least financially. Those placed in lower or lesser positions partook of lesser political power but they were never reduced to impotence. Subaltern offices formed crucial sites where political discontent could focus and be expressed. These citizens could, and did, use their political perches to exert opposition, thwart initiatives, or raise protests. When they allied with, or were influenced by, other factors – religion, external political forces and figures (stadhouders, emperors, and foreign powers), social and economic disruptions, and the like – they could coalesce powerful political blocs. They often played a more significant role in shaping political life than those who provided the raw material for street protests and urban violence, although such vigorous popular actions were neither rare nor fantastical as the frequency of urban revolts turning on political and constitutional issues repeatedly demonstrated.¹⁴¹

Therefore, if we widen our lens to accommodate the perspective of the early modern world, the occasions of political participation quickly mount up especially for citizens who involved themselves in parish, ward, and neighborhood organizations or who served in the various militias. Not everyone, of course, could be counted as a “political participant” even if we vastly expand the definition. Even women, or at least some women, had room to be politically active or at least engaged. They could do so publicly, as did the various deaconesses of the orphanages in Amsterdam, or could work behind the scenes as did many regents’ wives and daughters. The level of the parish or ward was also where most people, enfranchised or not, came into contact with all levels of government and all manner of governors.¹⁴² Parishes and wards surely constituted the locales where most people experienced politics, expressed political views, and shaped political actions. Other venues existed as well, such as the chambers of rhetoric in Dutch cities, guilds and, later, coffeehouses, clubs, and patriotic organizations. In comparing Rome and Amsterdam, one scholar observed that “in both cities, *informal* political pressure was the key to popular political

¹⁴¹ It was an old tradition and the literature on it is vast, but see: Wim P. Blockmans, “Alternatives to Monarchical Centralization: The Great Tradition of Revolt of Flanders and Brabant,” in Helmut G. Koenigsberger (ed.), *Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1988), 145–54; Marc Boone and Maarten Prak, “Rulers, Patricians, and Burghers: The Great and Little Traditions of Urban Revolt in the Low Countries (12th–18th Centuries),” in Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (eds.), *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 99–134.

¹⁴² Such a range of possibilities was common in many cities, whether Dutch, German, or Flemish. In Zwolle, for example, many citizens/burghers found room to participate in municipal government in the hundreds of offices that existed (some important, some considerably less so) and in the civic militia (*Manhafte Borger Regiment*). Jean C. Streng, “*Stemme in staat*”: *De bestuurlijke elite in de stadsrepubliek Zwolle, 1579–1795* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997), 87–158, 286–300.

participation... and all these forms were mobilized... in council chambers, guild halls, and [on] city streets.”¹⁴³ What held true for Rome and Amsterdam was no less true for Antwerp and Hamburg. Moreover, as this quote suggests, informal and formal processes frequently entwined or joined so fluidly as to be virtually indistinguishable.

Opening up these processes and entering these informal arenas, like trying to understand what “the people” thought about political issues and how they conceived of political culture, are not, however, straightforward tasks. Peter Arnade has recently shown that the civic republicanism of the Dutch Revolt was “gleaned less from learned treatises than from the stuff of popular politics.”¹⁴⁴ Dutch political culture, therefore, crystallized around certain actions, at certain moments, and in the day-to-day business of political negotiation; so, too, did the political cultures of Antwerp and Hamburg. Besides the actual moments of revolt, Arnade examined what he calls “popular commentary,” that is, pamphlets.¹⁴⁵ These exist in great numbers for Amsterdam and, if less voluminously, for Hamburg and Antwerp, and are, of course, an important point of historical intervention. Yet printed ephemera reflect popular responses imperfectly, and often in distorted ways. The pamphlet literature is critical – and is used extensively in the following chapters – but political pamphlets do not mirror accurately, or discuss comprehensively, early modern urban political culture. Political culture was complex and fragmented; it formed in several locations simultaneously. It always incorporated a melange of ideas and feelings about economics, behavior, propriety, and appearance. Long before Habermas’s “public sphere” arose, something like public opinion circulated and if its *political* content was sometimes veiled in discussions of adventurers, imposters, speculators, bankrupts, frauds, seducers, and betrayers of trust, it was nonetheless vibrant and important.¹⁴⁶

Determining what contemporaries thought about these matters, how they defined proper and improper actions at particular moments and in particular circumstances, and how they determined the tenets of their political and

¹⁴³ Henk van Nierop, “Politics and the People of Amsterdam,” in Peter van Kessel and Elisja Schulte (eds.), *Rome * Amsterdam: Two Growing Cities in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 167.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 332.

¹⁴⁵ Arnade, *Beggars*, passim; Craig Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1987).

¹⁴⁶ Arnade, *Beggars*, for example. For French history, the publications of Sarah Maza and Robert Darnton are especially important. Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995) and several works by Darnton but especially *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Prerevolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), and *The Devil in the Holy Water or the Art of Slander in France from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

civic cultures are the subjects the rest of this book discusses. In the merchant republics, the concerns were always simultaneously political and commercial. While the machinations and actions in the higher realms of political power cannot help but assume a critical role, it is the repercussions of these throughout society as well as the political and civic initiatives that often bubbled up from below that are revealed best in the several instances treated in subsequent chapters: corruption (a bedeviled historical concept if there ever was one); imposture and identity; economic “crimes” including fraud, speculation, and bankruptcy; and, finally, trust and transparency in both the political and business spheres.

While there is a danger inherent in expanding the category of politics widely because doing so runs the risk of emptying “politics” of all meaning, we must equally guard against a narrow definition that in no way corresponds to the experience of the Amsterdammers, Antwerpeners, and Hamburgers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Few historians today would be content with a treatment of politics and political culture that moved only at the level of the upper echelons of power or that ignored larger economic, social, and cultural issues. While examining, analyzing, and comparing structures form necessary first steps toward framing a historical discussion of politics and political cultures in the early modern world, politics is not static nor is it a “thing” that exists. Structures were deterministic in certain ways and knowing them allows us to understand the pathways traveled and exploited. Nonetheless, politics is inherently fluid and protean, a shape-shifter demonstrating confusingly numerous forms. Thus it is to the dynamics of politics in these cities that we must now turn to uncover and analyze not only how things changed over time, but why those metamorphoses occurred and who or what drove them.

Political dynamics and dilemmas

This book rests on the simple premise that the phrase “merchant republic” presents an argument as much as it offers a description. It maintains that these three cities exhibited a common tenor of life where politics and economics, mercantile precepts and political ideals, flowed together in ways that forcefully and peculiarly shaped civic existences. Concomitantly, trying to understand political and mercantile orientations and virtues (or vices) separately remains a futile and fruitless task. While the amphibious citizen equally at home in the bustling world of business and the weighty councils of government is an ideal type, enough men personified enough of these qualities to make them appear quite real personages, familiar to contemporaries as well as convincing mercantile, moral, and political exemplars. Obviously, not all merchants simultaneously governed. In addition, mercantile and administrative lives meshed differently in each city. Moreover, whereas at some times and in some places the overlap became so tight as to be indistinguishable, at others, it was almost imperceptible. Never did it fade to nothingness nor vanish from the consciousness of inhabitants. Traditions and circumstances rather than political philosophies and economic theories powerfully molded the civic *Weltanschauung*.

Political life in the three merchant republics was an intensely practical and circumstantial affair that generally provoked little deep scholarly reflection. Very few significant or extended works of political philosophy addressed their individual governance. There were, to be sure, writings that considered or responded to political events, but these, even the most expansive and subtle among them, such as Pieter de la Court's *Indications of the Proper Political Bases and Principles of the Republic of Holland and West-Friesland* (1671), tended to be evoked by particular circumstances. Hugo Grotius's great encomium on the freedom of the seas evolved from the specific circumstances attending Dutch entry into the Mediterranean and clashes with both Christian

and Muslim powers there.¹ This handful of works has assumed considerable weight in historical analysis, perhaps more than the numbers warrant. Scholars have made much of these admittedly important political treatises and their undoubted impact on European history.² However, when one turns to publications treating politics specifically in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, the most revealing writings, and the ones that had the greatest effect on contemporaries, were those published *sur le moment* and these often appeared in the form of ephemeral pamphlets.³ Like political writing, politics itself remained throughout the period mostly ad hoc and reactive based on immediate decisions in individual circumstances.

Another of De la Court's publications, perhaps his most influential, *The Interest of Holland* (first published in 1662), excellently illustrates the down-to-earth quality of the political writings that appeared in all three cities, if most voluminously in Amsterdam. *The Interest of Holland* did not explicate a political philosophy. Rather it did exactly what the subtitle indicated: it proposed to-do rules for the governing of the state.⁴ It has been generally viewed as a bible of free trade but was also a republican manifesto on the Dutch form of "true freedom." We encounter several such republican articles of faith over the course of the following pages from not only Amsterdam, but also Antwerp and Hamburg, and it is thus expedient here to turn our attention

¹ Pieter de la Court, *Aanwysing der heilsame politike gronden en maximen van de republike van Holland en West-Vriesland* (Leiden and Rotterdam: Hakkens, 1671). It is now generally accepted that several of Pieter de la Court's works were actually written or co-written by his brother, Johan, and perhaps others. Johan de Witt and other members of the party of "true freedom" clearly influenced De la Court's most famous and important work, *Interest van Holland, ofte, Gronden van Hollands-welvaren* (Amsterdam: Joan. Cyprianus vander Gracht, 1662).

² Jonathan Israel makes a case for the strength of Dutch participation in the formation of the "radical enlightenment" which he has presented in several works: *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³ A huge number of pamphlets exists for the early modern period. The enormously valuable compilation of "Dutch Pamphlets: The Collection in the Royal Library, The Hague" (known to scholars simply as "Knuttel") contains some 34,000 pamphlets dating from 1486 to 1795. Equally useful is the catalog to the collection: Willem Pieter Cornelis (ed.), *Catalogus van de pamfletten-verzameling berustende in de Koninklijke Bibliotheek* (9 vols., reprint; Utrecht: HES, 1978). The Knuttel collection covers all of the Low Countries and is, therefore, far more extensive than collections specifically on either Antwerp or Hamburg. A careful combing of the catalog in the Antwerp city library (Erfgoedbibliotheek Hendrik Conscience) also turned up a fair number of relevant pamphlets. Collections in Hamburg, especially the "Lochau collection" (StAHbg, Bibliothek, listed as "Acta Hamburgensien" [= "Lochau Sammlung"], omnibus vols. 201–21), are also large and very useful. Craig Harline evaluated political pamphlets for the period 1565 to 1648 in his *Pamphlets, Printing and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1987).

⁴ De la Court, *Interest*.

to what contemporaries and later generations of scholars variously meant by “republicanism” as well as a series of other fraught and freighted political words and realities: democracy, aristocracy, monarchy, and patriotism.

Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg all considered themselves republics. What republic meant in the context of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and what republicanism actually was in the same period have formed the subject of extensive historical investigation. Equally keen has been scholarly interest in what may be anachronistically termed “democracy,” democratic “tendencies” or “expressions.”

In these scholarly debates, no one has exerted more influence than J. G. A. Pocock. Pocock traced the intellectual persistence of republicanism as a “single intellectual phenomenon” from the medieval world through to the thinkers of the American Revolution. That authoritative and richly interpretive model has proved durable, yet it has not gone unquestioned. Not a few historians doubt that such a linear development ever existed and stress the many twists and turns, as well as cul-de-sacs and abysses on the way. Others, such as Jonathan Israel and Wijnand Mijnhardt, have cautioned that Pocock’s “Atlantic” republicanism was “not ‘Atlantic’ at all but, rather, specifically the Anglo-American classical republican tradition.”⁵ A two-volume edited collection on *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* expressed a strong wish for more detailed examinations of a period “most in need of further study . . . the one following the demise of the Renaissance city-republics and preceding the recrudescence of republican theory and practice in the era of the French Revolution.” The contributors pursued several themes: the rejection of monarchy, the figure of the citizen, the concept of citizenship, the predicament of the slave, and, most notably for this study, the attributes of the “virtuous citizen.” This last “prompted them [most republicans] to speak disparagingly of the acquisition of wealth as a base and even an unpatriotic pursuit.”⁶

The apparent inability of commerce and civic virtue to coexist was not merely a retrospective invention or a matter that tortured only the minds of political philosophers and moralists. Rather, it formed a hot button issue for contemporaries who feared the negative effects of commerce on civic virtue yet

⁵ The quote comes from Jonathan Israel, “Monarchy, Orangism, and Republicanism in the Later Dutch Golden Age,” Second Golden Age lecture, 11 March 2004 (Amsterdam: Amsterdams Centrum voor de Studie van de Gouden Eeuw, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2004), 5. Wijnand Mijnhardt, “The Limits of Present-Day Historiography of Republicanism,” *De achttiende eeuw* 37 (2005): 75–89. Similar doubts also found expression in the programmatic statement for a conference on “The Limits of the Atlantic Republican Tradition” organized by Margaret C. Jacob, Catherine Secretan, and Wijnand Mijnhardt at the Clark Library/UCLA Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies, 17–18 April 2009.

⁶ Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, vol. 1: *Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe*; vol. 2: *The Values of Republicanism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1: 1, 6.

also found themselves increasingly unable to deny the benefits that commerce brought to a polity. The dilemma was intellectual and philosophical, but also political and practical. Was commerce “the generator of peace, solidarity, and virtuous restraint, or . . . the corruptor of old mores and source of insatiable desires?”⁷

The traditional understanding of commerce viewed trade as a “public hazard that had to be carefully regulated” in order to prevent the self-serving greed of merchants from gaining the upper hand, jeopardizing civic virtue, and undercutting the greater welfare of the state. Over the course of the long eighteenth century, however, and virtually everywhere in Europe, that position gradually yielded to a more “modern conception of commerce as free private exchange naturally redounding to the social good.” Amalia Kessler has termed this a “revolution in commerce.” This revolution and the commercial practices that accompanied it, especially the widespread use of negotiable paper (most prominently bills of exchange), also produced considerable anxiety and thorny real problems of how to deal with the vices that so often accompanied such changes, or at least seemed their boon companions.⁸ Although the merchant republics lived and breathed commerce, what might be called the “republican-commercial” dilemma existed there as well, albeit in a muted form. Subsequent chapters have a great deal more to say about this problem and especially about how to resolve the scholarly dilemma existing between discourse and practice, where a pronounced moralistic discourse about the acquisition of wealth existed alongside its quite real presence. It suffices here to suggest how the merchant republics conceived of their republicanism in action more than in thought. They simply could not define their civism or civic virtues using commerce as a foil.⁹

⁷ Commerce in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Francesca Trivellato has recently observed, elicited “multifarious, deeply ambivalent, and ever-contested views.” “Credit, Honor, and the Early Modern French Legend of the Jewish Invention of Bills of Exchange,” *JMH* 84 (2012): 289. See also, Amalia D. Kessler, *A Revolution in Commerce: The Parisian Merchant Court and the Rise of Commercial Society in Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998); Carl Winnerlind, *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution, 1620–1720* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁸ Kessler, *Revolution in Commerce*, 3–4.

⁹ For a discussion of how another commercial city, Marseille, negotiated this dilemma in the eighteenth-century, see Junko Thérèse Takeda, *Between Crown & Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). Takeda focuses on Marseille to generate “a valuable new perspective into understanding the dynamics of how traditional local institutions, practices, languages, and rituals interacted with new circumstances and sociopolitical realities in early modern Europe.” (2) One of these new realities was indeed the “revolution in commerce” Kessler identifies (*Revolution in Commerce*, 3). Takeda argues that Marseille had “deeply rooted structures that resisted change at the same time that they provided foundations for commercial expansion and state-building.” (2)

Historians have offered quite different definitions of republicanism in the merchant republics. Some located the defining moment of Dutch and Amsterdam republicanism in the idea of “true freedom” (*ware vrijheid*) that developed between 1650 and 1672. This Dutch republicanism was, however, not the avatar of modern democratic republics but rather the effort of Dutch patricians to articulate and defend their privileges against the pressures of a monarchical Europe.¹⁰ Contemporaries, of course, could not benefit from that long historical view nor could they discern its teleology. Nonetheless, they, too, cherished certain visions of republicanism or rather used the term to describe how their governments were constituted.

Almost everyone perceived the merchant republics as “mixed republics.” Thomas Lediard wrote about Hamburg: “Their Form of Government is mixed, and has something of the Democritical, and something of the Aristocratical.” Antwerp, too, “is governed in the manner of . . . the Republic of the Lacedaemonians [Spartans], that is, by monarchy through which the ruler exercises sovereignty, through aristocracy by which the magistracy maintains its authority, [and] through democracy through which the common folk . . . provide the means of defense.”¹¹ Each in pure form proved dangerous – pure democracy produced anarchy, pure monarchy despotism, and pure aristocracy, while assuredly the safest of the three, could nonetheless degenerate into oligarchy and tyranny. If a clear preference existed, it was for aristocracy in the older sense of the “best men” and thus necessarily a limited number.¹² In this way all the merchant republics were aristocracies. The early seventeenth-century Amsterdam burgomaster Cornelis Pietersz. Hooft admitted no contradiction in praising the “aristocratic-republican” form of government as “in my opinion the most appropriate and reliable.”¹³ Thus, too, the Hamburg political commentator, Jonas Ludwig von Heß, could value at one and the same time “true liberty” and abhor “violent revolution and anarchistic

¹⁰ Frijhoff/Prak-2: 169.

¹¹ Thomas Lediard, *The German Spy, or Familiar Letters from a Gentleman on his Travels thro' Germany, to his Friend in England* . . . (2nd edn; London: T. Cooper, 1740), 178; Johannes G. J. de Roveroy, *Chronyke van Antwerpen, vervattende, de bekeeringe ende voortgang in de waere Catholyke religie* . . . Voorts alle de geschiedenisse, trobbelen, oploopen . . . (Antwerp: J. F. de Roveroy, 1775), 1: 153. For general definitions on “Democratie” and “Aristocratie,” see Zedler, who also defines oligarchy as “when the power of the [aristocrats] . . . is misused, we call it an oligarchy, that just like a monarchy can degenerate into tyranny.”

¹² This picture of the ideal form of a state, as “an exemplary mixture of the positive [qualities] of the monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic forms of state, with a dominant influence of the aristocratic” was quite old and formed part of the “Netherlandish tradition,” for instance. Guido de Bruin, *Geheimhouding en verraad: De geheimhouding van staatszaken ten tijde van de Republiek (1600–1700)* (The Hague: SDU, 1991), 591.

¹³ Hooft quoted in Hendrik A. Enno van Gelder, *De levensbeschouwing van Corn. Pietersz. Hooft, Burgemeester van Amsterdam, 1547–1626* (Amsterdam: A. H. Kruyt, 1918; reprint, Utrecht: HES, 1982), 160.

freedom.”¹⁴ Not everyone agreed, and throughout the long eighteenth century, especially in late seventeenth-century Hamburg and eighteenth-century Amsterdam, but also if in a more subdued version, in Antwerp, movements often termed “democratic” rose up against the aristocracies (or the oligarchies) that governed these cities to demand the restitution of “older freedoms” or “liberties lost.” The discourse remained that of republics and republicanism; it was employed by Amsterdammers, Antwerpeners, and Hamburgers in exercises of self-understanding and in defending themselves and their freedoms against outsiders.

Pocock’s arguments have resonated with scholars of German, Dutch, and Flemish history,¹⁵ although other threads of analysis attribute the roots of republicanism to another source: the “political culture of the old European city *Bürgerium*.” Especially insightful and influential here has been the work of Heinz Schilling that takes a long view on the ideas and reality of *Republikanismus* as well as locating it within a wider western European perspective that includes the Dutch, Flemish, and Swiss urban experiences.¹⁶ Although much of his work centers on uprisings, revolts, and revolutions, it also offers a discerning analysis of what he called the “intra-urban principles of order.” Schilling concludes that while one looks in vain for a well-articulated and political theory of republicanism in the late medieval and early modern cities and while, before the Thirty Years War, no “real republicanism” existed in the German cities, nonetheless “the political ideals of order among the German burgher communities can be reckoned as part of the stream of [that] older political thought from which sprang [both] the early modern and even the modern forms of republicanism.” This internal urban order rested firmly on four pillars: (1) the recognition and protection of a sense of freedom pertaining to person and property; (2) the certainty that all citizens would share burdens and duties; (3) the demand that all members of the commune could participate in exercising political authority and power; (4) “the oligarchic-egalitarian structure of the urban political elite.” The last of these may seem a contradiction in terms, as does the frequently employed phrase “aristocratic-republican,” but both corresponded well to the expectations of an urban

¹⁴ [Jonas Ludwig von Heß], *Hamburgs bestes Glück nicht von Außen: Von einem Hamburger* ([Hamburg], 1801), 3–4.

¹⁵ Several articles in van Gelderen and Skinner, *Republicanism*, address the German and Dutch experiences.

¹⁶ Schilling’s work is often comparative. Besides discussing the political situation in German/Swiss cities, he has also written specifically on the Dutch experience, see, for example, his “Der libertär-radikale Republikanismus der holländischen Regenten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des politischen Radikalismus in der frühen Neuzeit,” in Hans-Christoph Schröder (ed.), *Politischer Radikalismus im 17. Jahrhundert*, special issue of *GG* 10, 4 (1984): 498–533. See also André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen, and Maarten Prak (eds.), *The Republican Alternative: The Netherlands and Switzerland Compared* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

citizenry.¹⁷ Conflicts arose out of differing interpretations of how these pillars should be best secured. Nothing in Schilling's argument directly contradicts Pocock, rather they focus on different parameters. Schilling's work more specifically addresses the experience of central cities and thus assumes greater relevance here. Schilling, for his part, had little to say about the interaction of commerce and politics.¹⁸

One of the most valuable reinterpretations of Pocockian republicanism has been the recognition that the antagonism supposedly existing between commerce and virtue, or commerce and liberty, has been vastly overstated. Not only did it not pertain in the real world of urban politics and merchant life, but also economic and political thought had gone a long way toward reconciling the two at least as early as the mid to late seventeenth century.¹⁹ Certainly, the concepts of "merchant republics" and "mercantile republicanism" characteristic of cities such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg argue for a re-casting of the debate and raise serious challenges to the posited conflict between civic virtue and trade.

Some scholars, however, still accept that Europeans, while they "valued the advantages that the growth of commercial life brought with it," continued throughout the eighteenth century to hold "an ambivalent attitude . . . to the growth of luxury or opulence in their societies." Contemporaries, in this view, were "disturbed by the effects of increased material wealth upon moral well-being."²⁰ In 1991, Simon Schama wrote what has clearly become the best-known and most widely read work on the moral, psychological, and personal dilemmas affluence presented. His *The Embarrassment of Riches* advanced an interpretation of Dutch culture that turned on the "moral ambiguity of good

¹⁷ Extremely useful is an article published in 1988: Heinz Schilling, "Gab es im späten Mittelalter und zu Beginn der Neuzeit in Deutschland einen städtischen 'Republikanismus'?" in Helmut Koenigsberger, *Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1988), 101–43; here 103, 142–3. Peter Blickle's two volumes on communalism sketch out another perspective on the political life and culture of communities, the German *Gemeinde* (both rural and urban), as an elemental unit of social organization. *Kommunalismus: Skizzen einer gesellschaftlichen Organisationsform*, vol. 1: *Oberdeutschland*, vol. 2: *Europa* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2000).

¹⁸ Generally, historians who have addressed early modern urban politics have stressed economic issues in respect to tensions between merchants and artisans on commercial policies and the price of food, fuel, building materials, and the like. See, for example, the short summary in Christopher R. Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 27–9.

¹⁹ See, for instance, the several articles in the section on "Republicanism and the Rise of Commerce" in van Gelderen and Skinner, *Republicanism*, 2: 175–310. These, however, focus mostly on the Enlightenment and the late eighteenth century.

²⁰ Prospectus for the conference on "The Self-Perception of Early Modern 'Capitalists'," Conference at the Clark Library/UCLA Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies, 19–20 January 2007. See also the resultant volume: Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (eds.), *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

fortune.” Thus *overvloed*, the abundance of everything, in the Dutch Republic proved both a blessing and a curse. Ambition, too, remained securely linked to vice and “emerged from the early modern period Janus-like, a two-faced passion, a virtuous vice.”²¹

How much hand-wringing early modern capitalists engaged in, how much the “threat of abundance” or the fears of overweening ambition actually distressed them are debatable questions and concern us more extensively later in analyzing speculation and bankruptcy. It can hardly be denied that much anxiety – or at least nervousness – accompanied business ventures and that the emerging global trade and credit markets that busied Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries generated great opportunities but also bore with them equally great risks. Still, it is a long step from a bout of nerves to deep-seated anxiety, and an even longer one to full-blown incapacity. Apprehensiveness about outcomes is not the same as moral ambiguity. One cannot maintain, of course, that debates over the morality of wealth, trade, and commerce never troubled citizens in all three cities; literally thousands of writings addressed just this subject. Nonetheless, these critiques need to be read against the reality of what people did on a daily basis and also against other literature that praised mercantile values as precisely the best guarantors of civic freedoms.²²

In pace-maker economies, like Amsterdam and Hamburg, people experienced relatively little difficulty in melding acquisitive tendencies and commercial lives with civic virtue and a sense of republicanism. In Antwerp, too, this synthesis existed, if to a lesser extent. Thus, Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg can be seen as exemplifying a commercial or mercantile republicanism that differed from the models described by Pocock and Gordon Wood. Mark Philp has recently observed that “one of the most transforming of eighteenth-century innovations . . . was writers’ increasing willingness to commend commerce and the accumulation of wealth as symptoms of civic health and strength, rather than of corrupt self-seeking.”²³ Philp mostly concerned himself with the English situation, but this same combination of commerce and civic virtue had emerged in commercial republics long before 1700. The early seventeenth-century Dutch

²¹ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Fontana, 1991), 7–8; Dorothee Sturkenboom, “Merchants on the Defensive: National Self-Image in the Dutch Republic of the Late Eighteenth Century,” in Jacob and Secretan, *Self-Perception*, 99–122; William Casey King, *Ambition, A History: From Vice to Virtue* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 7.

²² On economic anxiety, see the introduction to Jacob and Secretan, *Self-Perception*, 1–16; Clé Lesger, “Merchants in Charge: The Self-Perception of Amsterdam Merchants, ca. 1550–1700,” in *ibid.*, 75–98; and Mary Lindemann, “The Anxious Merchant, the Bold Speculator, and the Malicious Bankrupt: Doing Business in Eighteenth-Century Hamburg,” in *ibid.*, 161–82.

²³ Mark Philp, “Enlightenment, Republicanism and Radicalism,” in Martin Fitzpatrick, Peter Jones, Christa Knellwolf, and Ian McCalman (eds.), *The Enlightenment World* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 463.

polymath, Caspar van Barlaeus (1584–1648), for example, was “bold in his intention to refute the common assumption that commerce stood in opposition to virtue and the pursuit of wisdom.” He further opined that “commerce could itself be among the best pursuits of human life” and even referred to God as “the great Factor.”²⁴

Ambivalence about commerce and the acquisition of wealth in general, despite some serious worries about particular business practices and continued jitters about bankrupts and economic imposters, did not characterize cities where citizens took commercialism for granted. Both Hamburg’s well-known “moral weekly,” *Der Patriot* (1721–4) and the founding articles of the Hamburg Patriotic Society (1765) praised the merchant as the pillar of the state and the personification of virtue, while simultaneously locating the happiness and stability of a good republic not in its constitution, or in its constitution alone, but rather in the activities of trade and the fulfillment of civic responsibilities.²⁵

Similar sentiments are also expressed, for example, in *The Merchant* (*De Koopman*) published between 1766 and 1777 in Amsterdam. The eponymous *Merchant* affirmed that assuring “the preservation and expansion of trade [*negotie*]” characterized “all civilized peoples” and provided them with the necessities, conveniences, and luxuries of life. Commerce formed “the bedrock of civic welfare.” Thus, he concluded, trade is “the flower, the origin, and the salvation of all polities and human communities,” and “a MERCHANT is the most valuable member [of the community] and its most necessary and honorable occupation.” If critics deplored serious lapses in mercantile virtues – failings that included economic malfeasance such as rash speculation, fraud in instruments of credit, and malicious bankruptcies – they virtually never blamed commerce per se.²⁶

²⁴ Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 70–1.

²⁵ The founding articles of the Patriotic Society are quoted in Franklin Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte der Aufklärung in Hamburg und Altona* (2nd edn; Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1990), 332. The motif of the merchant as the pillar of the state ran through *Der Patriot* which appeared from 1724 to 1726. See especially no. 6 (10 February 1724) and no. 31 (3 August 1724). On the composition of a “well-constituted republic,” see no. 113 (28 February 1726). *Der Patriot* also criticized lapses in mercantile and civic virtues discussing, for instance, “carriage-luxury” in no. 9 (10 February 1724); the bankruptcies that resulted from careless management and poor business practices in no. 10 (9 March 1724); models of the rational merchant and his opposite number in no. 31 (3 August 1724); money-management in no. 97 (8 November 1725) and in no. 117 (28 March 1726).

²⁶ *De Koopman*’s full title was *De Koopman of weekelyksche by-dragen ten ophouw van Neêrlands koophandel en zeevaard*. It appeared weekly from 1768 through 1776 and was then published in 6 parts (Amsterdam: Gerrit Bom, 1768–76); the author was Gerrit Bom [quotes are from no. 2 (1768): 10, 13, 15]. Philip Quarles van Ufford, Fleur Romése, and Bert-Jan Verbeek (eds.), *De ideologie van de markt: De koopman tussen staat en burger* (Bussum: Coutinho, 1998); Hajo Brugmans, “De koopman: Mercurius als Spectator,” *Jaarboek van het Genootschap Amstelodamum* 11 (1913): 61–135.

Replacing one concept of republicanism – that predicated on the crises of successive Machiavellian moments – with another – merchant republicanism – offers not altogether the perfect solution to the republican/commercial dilemma as it inadequately reflects the complexity of political life and political culture in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg (or elsewhere for that matter). The real problem with mooring the republicanism of these cities to a commercial or mercantile republicanism *tout court* is not that it is wrong but that it is one-sided; it unduly privileges economics. Citizens in these three cities rarely divided their political identity as citizens from their identity as economic and merchants.²⁷ They were both *simultaneously*.

Debates on civic virtue, citizenship, and morality dovetailed with the currently running discussion of luxury. The luxury question was a hoary one but emerged with renewed intensity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moralists continued (and continue!) to fault luxury as the downfall of economic initiative, the generator of selfishness, and the provenance of impoverishment; it was, moreover, the acid that corroded communal responsibility and civic virtue. Yet this analysis was by no means the only, and perhaps not even the dominant, one, certainly not by the eighteenth century and even more certainly not in cities like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, although the rhetoric can be found there as well.²⁸ A biographical example concisely illustrates this attitude. Johann Georg Büsch, professor of mathematics and history at the academic gymnasium in Hamburg, was the motivating spirit behind the establishment of Hamburg's famous General Poor Relief set up in 1788. Büsch also wrote prolifically on political economy; indeed contemporaries regarded him as a major figure in the field. Büsch's definitions of poverty were structural: the shape and function of Hamburg's economy, not indolence, vice, and turpitude, had bred great misery. He recognized that the very commercial nature of Hamburg's economy generated cycles of under- and unemployment that laborers could neither control nor combat. Luxury and foolish spending might exacerbate the problem but were not its causes.²⁹

²⁷ See, for example, Simon Schama's observation that the burgher was "a citizen first and *homo economicus* second" in *Embarrassment*, 7.

²⁸ For Hamburg, see Katherine B. Aaslestad, *Place and Politics: Local History, Civic Culture and German Nationalism in Northern Germany during the Revolutionary Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). More generally, see Daniel L. Purdy, *The Tyranny of Elegance: Consumer Cosmopolitanism in the Era of Goethe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

²⁹ On the history of the General Poor Relief (*Allgemeine Armenanstalt*), see Mary Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers: Hamburg, 1712–1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), especially 74–99. Büsch enjoyed a European-wide reputation as a political economist in the late eighteenth century. He was an extremely prolific writer on trade, commerce, money, and numerous other subjects in addition to his many works on poor relief. On his influence, see Jürgen Zabeck and Frank Hatje, *Johann Georg Büsch (1728–1800): Wirtschaftliches Denken und soziales Handeln* (Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1992); On the founding and influence of the Handels-Akademie, Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge*, 674–5; Jürgen Zabeck, *Johann Georg Büsch: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und zur Methodologie der Wirtschaftswissenschaften*

Historical writing on luxury and on this “luxury question” is almost as voluminous as that treating republicanism and the overlap of the two subjects is likewise striking. For those caught up in the debate over “Machiavellian moments” and in identifying the tensions between commerce and virtue, luxury proves a critical issue. “Simply put,” Jan de Vries trenchantly observes, luxury has been treated as “the enemy of virtue.” Luxury, like commerce, stood as the counterpole of independence and thus also as the eradicator of republican virtue.³⁰ Early modern condemnations of the evil effects that luxury wrought on civic and political virtues are legion and the weight of this evidence and its rhetorical flourishes have swayed many historians. In fact, in western Europe, and especially in commercial centers anti-luxury rhetoric formed a rearguard action, if also a loudly vociferous one. The battle had already been won.

De Vries’s work on the *Industrious Revolution* considers these changes at length. In respect to the Dutch Republic, he notes that “many historians of earlier generations,” following contemporary rhetoric, believed that “the Republic’s decline after the 1670s was closely associated with, if not caused by, the onset of a cultural overripeness which befell . . . a generation of Dutchmen accustomed to luxury and, therefore, lacking the noble character and fortitude of their forefathers.” Such views coursed not only through the cities of the Dutch Republic; they were also to be found toward the end of the eighteenth century in Hamburg and Antwerp. But, De Vries points out, these interpretations rely “on an old discourse that no longer applies to the reality of new practices.”³¹ One must wonder to what extent such commercial republics *ever* really accepted this position, because it was “precisely in commercial societies” where “self-love was no longer despised” and where republican theory most quickly and successfully accommodated luxury. Likewise in the eighteenth century, this “new luxury” of widespread consumerism found thinkers who successfully theorized it and who raised commerce to a “powerful, civilizing agent” that sustained political and civic stability; it was itself a benison and not the canker that hollowed out civic virtue.³²

Even for the worker bees in Mandeville’s hive, the tree of luxury did not necessarily bear only poisonous fruit. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commentary surely railed at the unnecessary, pauperizing luxuries upon which the *menu peuple* supposedly wasted their money: fancy clothes, pocket watches, sumptuous funerals, drink, and tobacco. A simultaneous recognition, however, acknowledged that even the vices that ruined individuals might benefit state and society at large. Obviously that was Mandeville’s argument, but others

und der Wirtschaftspädagogik (Hamburg: Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät der Universität, 1964).

³⁰ Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 44.

³¹ De Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, 53–4; on Hamburg, Aaslestad, *Place and Politics*, 33–77.

³² De Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, 59, 61.

repeated it in a wide variety of instances. In the 1790s, for example, in a debate over “luxury, citizen virtues, and the well-being of the society,” Georg Sieveking, a prominent Hamburg merchant, argued that luxury resulted from “the effort [expended] for the satisfaction of needs, comforts, pleasures, and appearances. It is a powerful force that drives useful activity and thus is valuable for the state and for individuals when they can fulfill their desires without neglecting their higher duties.”³³

In commercial centers like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, republican virtue and republicanism, therefore, comfortably coexisted with commerce, acquisitiveness, and luxury. Tensions between economics and politics often turned on practical issues, certainly, and it would be foolish to argue that economic desires never crossed with political expedients. These problems, however, never undercut the stable accommodation between commercial prosperity and the greater good of the community and the polity. Contemporaries frequently remarked on how seamlessly they meshed. Thomas Lediard, for instance, observed of Hamburg’s merchants that “at the same time that they make their own Fortune, they promote the Good of the Republic, which is again their own.”³⁴ Even Büsch, who viewed with considerable distaste the philistinism many Hamburg *gens d’affaires* exhibited, warmly favored the idea that free trade, self-interest, and economic prosperity anchored the foundations on which philanthropy as well as civic virtue and communal liberties rested.³⁵

Thus, not everyone, and not even reformers agreed that commerce and all that went with it – luxury, acquisitiveness, and avarice – diluted civic virtue or made a republican system unworkable or difficult to maintain. Just as clearly, most living in mercantile republics like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, worried little about the complex of issues that disquieted intellectuals, moralists, and political theorists elsewhere. One cannot, however, simply wish the rhetoric out of existence and deny the fulminations that reached the public in the form of religiously inspired jeremiads bemoaning the slacking of morals, decrying the grasping nature of “these wicked times,” or lamenting the decay and degeneration observed virtually everywhere. What needs to be answered here is why. If everyone was happily acquiring, spending, trading, and not worrying about the effects that such had on public virtue, political morals, or the greater good of the “republic,” why then the rhetoric? Even more, why was there *so much* of it?

Economic and political perturbations undammed floods of castigation and criticism. It is not very difficult to link crises with an upsurge in the numbers and the intensity of complaints, rhetorical breast-beating, and expressions of

³³ Georg Heinrich Sieveking, “Fragmente über Luxus, Bürger-Tugend und Bürger-Wohl,” *Hamburgische Gesellschaft zur Beförderung der Künste und nützlichen Gewerbe Verhandlungen und Schriften* 4 (1797): 164.

³⁴ Lediard, *German Spy*, 258. ³⁵ Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 93–9.

distress. Moreover, a thin but persistent trickle of concern about the decline of civic virtues continued to drip even in good times; indeed, sometimes uncommon prosperity and peace provoked fear and gave it voice, predicting that good times now would have to be paid for later. Still, for some, that perspective, a sort of “embarrassment of riches” did not, *pace* Schama, determine lives or provide an umbrella explanation of how people lived in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. Rather, as Clé Lesger has observed, merchant-governors felt very much “in charge,” as they very much were. “Their self-assurance in the economic, political, and social realm seems not to have been undermined by doubts about the salvation of their souls or by embarrassment over their riches.”³⁶ Of course, concern about the effect of luxury and commercial life on civic virtues differed from concern about the redemption of souls, but here, too, one finds little sense that most people in Amsterdam, Antwerp, or Hamburg viewed the merchant in any way as *not* a good citizen; the opposite was true. Writing in the dark years of the Napoleonic Continental System that had so disastrously disrupted commerce in northern Europe, Johann A. H. Reimarus, scion of a famous Hamburg family, endowed commerce and merchants with a broadly defined civilizing mission that reached back into ancient times. He was not alone in his enthusiasm.³⁷

Merchants, governors, and patriots

As important as republicanism and the rhetoric of republicanism became in eighteenth-century continental Europe, another rhetoric mixed with it: patriotism. Like republicanism, patriotism, too, had several meanings and realities, some more, some less political, but never identical to the nineteenth-century form. One scholarly tendency has been to identify patriotism as a social and civic, rather than a political, trait. About thirty years ago, Harvey Chisick, basing his analysis on prerevolutionary France, argued that in the eighteenth century “patriotism was primarily a social, and not, as it was in antiquity and was again to become, a political concept.” Enlightenment patriotism, therefore, “positively oriented [itself] toward assuring the well-being of the whole community.” An eighteenth-century patriot “had done something to promote the common good, such as . . . written a book on agriculture, or education, or ethics, or who had performed a signal act of beneficence.”³⁸

This socially inspired patriotism existed in all three merchant republics, excellently reflected in a series of publications, such as the moral weeklies or “spectators” in Dutch and German, which promoted endeavors to establish

³⁶ Lesger, “Merchants in Charge,” 91.

³⁷ Johann A. H. Reimarus, *Der Kaufmann* (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1808).

³⁸ Harvey Chisick, *The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment: Attitudes Toward the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 223.

and further the common good, to improve morals, stimulate economic growth, and to forestall or rectify perceived decline. Patriots associated in clubs and “useful societies” proliferated in the eighteenth century. In these cities the commercial aspects of patriotism weighed as heavily as did the political content. Traditional historiography regards these groups as essentially apolitical, albeit also as the embodiment of a newly developing public sphere. Accordingly, their members hesitated to get involved in political commentary and were, moreover, never (or rarely) part of the state. They were assuredly *not* political in the sense of promoting a particular “P”olitical position and rarely if ever overtly criticized established authorities. Nonetheless, in an expanded meaning of political, the meaning most closely allied to the concepts of early modern republicanism, these eighteenth-century commentators proved quite political. Van Effen’s *Dutch Spectator* (*Hollandsche Spectator*) promised to forbear from matters touching church and state, but “as a proper subject” also noted that “I can never pass up the opportunity to urge upon my fellows the love and the obedience which one owes to the authorities.”³⁹

Divorcing economic and moral concerns from politics rarely proved easy. In Hamburg, for instance, one would be hard-pressed to dissociate political values from the social and civic ones the moral weeklies panegyricized. In the 1720s, a group of men authored one such publication: *The Patriot*. Written only a dozen years after the resolution of a major constitutional conflict and in the wake of the promulgation of a new constitution (1712), the authors sought to reawaken men to their duties as citizens and revive what they viewed as languishing civic virtues, while also instilling new ones suited to changing times. *The Patriot*, as a vehicle of the early Enlightenment, pushed a program of reform and regeneration framed within the boundaries of existing government and, not at all unusually, also acknowledged no contradiction between faith and reason, piety and reform. *The Patriot* found it impossible to imagine “any state in which Christianity has decayed because some of its subjects rely on natural laws and rational principles, [and] work to guide their fellow citizens away from follies in those things which relate to everyday social relationships, domestic life, education, and so on.” Each patriot should, therefore, bend his energies toward eliminating those “thousand things . . . which harm the soul . . . and impair [our] health, retard our prosperity, and damage

³⁹ Most of the literature on the “patriotic” and “useful” societies and groups stresses their apolitical nature. See, for example, Jan Hartog, *De spectatoriale geschriften van 1741–1800: Bijdrage tot de kennis van het huiselijk, maatschappelijk en kerkelijk leven onder ons volk, in de tweede helft der 18de eeuw* (2nd expanded and improved edn.; Utrecht: Gebr. van der Post, 1890), 147–9; Petrus J. Buijnsters, *Spectatoriale geschriften* (Utrecht: HES, 1991); Ulrich Im Hoff, *Das gesellige Jahrhundert: Gesellschaft und Gesellschaften im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Munich: Beck, 1982); Wolfgang Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend: Die Aufklärung im Spiegel der deutschen Moralischen Wochenschriften* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1971). Van Effen quote from *Hollandsche Spectator*, no. 10 (22 October 1731).

our property.” High on the list of these “thousand things” was the promotion of commerce and commercial virtues, including the better education of merchants.⁴⁰

In a very real sense, therefore, *The Patriot* was never apolitical. Hamburg’s patriots (like those in Amsterdam and Antwerp) never renounced politics nor did they ever intend to abandon political pathways. Their societies, like Hamburg’s Patriotic Society of 1765 (and its full name – *The Hamburg Society for the Promotion of the Arts and Useful Crafts* – reflects its civic purpose),⁴¹ only rhetorically eschewed politics. These patriots were never really isolated from positions of political power; the very opposite was true. The Patriotic Society, like the earlier group of 1720 patriots, included many academics, but also men influential in government. The 1720ers, for example, counted among their ranks syndics like Johann Julius Surland, Conrad Widow, and Johann Klefeker. One very active participant was the poet Barthold Heinrich Brockes, who served long years in the Hamburg Senate (from 1720 until his death in 1747) and held several other major government posts. That tendency became even more pronounced in the post-1765 generation of patriots.⁴²

Hamburg’s mid-century patriots counted among the most fervent supporters of the existing governmental structure to which many of them belonged, although they recognized its inadequacies and worked to correct them. Not all members of the circle around *The Patriot* or who belonged to the Patriotic Society held, or were eligible to hold, public office, but very many did. Among the former could be counted men like Büsch who were, however, very close to the mercantile elite both in terms of marriage alliances and convictions. Late in the eighteenth century, another of these patriots, the physician, Johann A. H. Reimarus, extolled Hamburg’s “free constitution,” while placing the responsibility for sustaining this “true liberty” squarely on the shoulders of Hamburg’s citizens. His 1808 publication, *The Merchant*, written to protest the Continental System, made clear that “[in Hamburg] no arbitrary power thwarts the exercise of our rights.” Moreover, he continued, “we recognize no inherited family privileges... [and] positions of authority are honorary... [and]

⁴⁰ Wolfgang Martens (ed.), *Der Patriot nach dem Originalausgabe Hamburg 1724–1726 in drei Textbänden und einem Kommentarband kritisch herausgegeben* (4 vols.; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969–84); *Der Patriot*, no. 4 (27 January 1724). The issue of poor relief was discussed extensively in *Der Patriot*, no. 37 (13 September 1724); see also commentary in Martens, *Patriot*, 1: 311–12, 315; 2: 199–200. On the influence of the Patriot circle, Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge*, 260–72.

⁴¹ Franklin Kopitzsch, “Die Hamburgische Gesellschaft zur Beförderung der Künste und nützlichen Gewerbe (Patriotische Gesellschaft von 1765) im Zeitalter der Aufklärung: Ein Überblick,” in Rudolf Vierhaus (ed.), *Deutsche patriotische und gemeinnützige Gesellschaften* (Munich: Kraus, 1980), 71–118; Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge*, 328–56.

⁴² Hans-Dieter Loose (ed.), *Barthold Heinrich Brockes (1680–1747): Dichter und Ratsherr in Hamburg, Neue Forschungen zu Persönlichkeit und Wirkung* (Hamburg: Christians, 1980); Eckart Kleßmann, *Barthold Heinrich Brockes* (Hamburg: Eilert & Richter, 2003).

exercised voluntarily.”⁴³ The founding articles of the 1765 Patriotic Society stressed the criticality of the city’s mercantile foundation: “our republic is nothing more than a commercial state, where each and every thing derives its politics, its livelihood, and its very essence from commerce.” Overstated though that may be, it superbly reflects the recognition among the men of 1765 that the merchant proved the best citizen, a sentiment shared in Amsterdam and, if perhaps in a somewhat watered-down version, in Antwerp as well.⁴⁴

Eighteenth-century patriotism in Amsterdam took a similar line, but also differed. Here a harder political edge and a greater expression of oppositional politics existed among those who would term themselves *Patriots* in the 1780s.⁴⁵ A real political opposition movement against the regents developed in the province of Holland at mid century. Major disturbances, beginning with the so-called Doelisten movement that favored the stadhouder but which also incorporated moderate and more radical democratic demands and involved a series of violent attacks on tax-farmers, broke out in the late 1740s. Jonathan Israel characterizes “the whole tenor of the demands” as seeking “that regent government should be made answerable to the citizenry and supervised . . . by the body of the militia and other representatives of the people.” These uprisings became Orangist in character, that is, favored the stadhouder, Willem IV, Prince of Orange.

Popular sentiment agitated for the removal of the current burgomasters in Amsterdam and eventually spurred Willem into action. Willem’s decisions did not fully satisfy the Patriots. He dismissed nineteen of the thirty-six members of the *vroedschap* and even appointed a few who were merchants but not members of the existing regent group. Nonetheless, the other appointees, including all four of the new burgomasters, came from old and entrenched regent families. Thus everything gained in this revolt redounded to the benefit of the stadhouder and Orangist adherents (the *prinsgezinde*). Moreover, with the death of Willem IV in 1751, the roll-back began and the partisans of true freedom (*staatsgezinde*) recovered lost ground. In the wake of this upset, and in an effort to close ranks against the power of the stadhouder,

⁴³ Johann A. H. Reimarus, *Entwurf eines allgemeinen Staats-Unterrichts für künftige Bürger* (Hamburg: Campe, 1803); Reimarus, *Kaufmann*.

⁴⁴ Johann Ulrich Pauli, *An alle wahre Patrioten Hamburgs gerichtete Ermahnung, zur Aufrichtung einer ähnlichen Patriotischen Gesellschaft, zur Aufnahme der Handlung, der Künste, der Manufacturen und des Ackerbaues, wie die zu London und Paris ist; nebst einer Beylage: Auszug aus der Handlungszeitung von Paris genannt, den gegenwärtigen Zustand beyder Gesellschaften betreffend* (Hamburg: n.p., 1765), quoted in Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge*, 333.

⁴⁵ Israel, 1098–1112; Stephan R. E. Klein, *Patriots republikenisme: Politieke cultuur in Nederland (1766–1787)* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1995); Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780–1813* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Joost G. M. M. Rosendaal, *De Nederlandse revolutie: Vrijheid, volk en vaderland 1783–1799* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2005); Theo S. M. van der Zee, Joost G.M.M. Rosendaal, and Peter G. B. Thissen (eds.), 1787: *De Nederlandse revolutie?* (Amsterdam: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1988).

the regents drafted the 1752 "Points of Order," the city's famous contract of correspondence. This document solidified the hold of the burgomasters on power that was already firmly implanted in Bontemantel's time. It also regulated the distribution of *vroedschap* and other major positions. From this point onward, "seniority alone . . . will determine the advance up the ladder of [government] posts."⁴⁶ Conflicts and intra-regent strivings hardly ended, however.

Patriot politics radicalized in the 1780s. Patriotism now became more strident, acquired a stronger political coloration, and developed what might be considered an articulated political program. The Tom Paine of the Dutch Patriot Movement was Baron Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol whose "To the Netherlandish Folk" appeared in 1781; it bore a democratic and radical message.⁴⁷ The Orangism of the 1748 Doelisten/Patriot revolt now became anti-Orange (and anti-English), although it continued its hostility to the regents. According to Capellen, the family of Orange had suppressed the true freedom of the Dutch. The purpose here was to "wrest control of civic and provincial life from the hands of the Stadholder's favourites, and the regent oligarchies, and transfer power to those who regarded themselves as the spokesmen and representatives of the people."⁴⁸ Agitation became intense in Amsterdam in early 1787, when the newly reorganized militia, now calling itself the Free Corps, orchestrated public demonstrations and demanded that the *vroedschap* abandon its traditional methods of choosing members. Willem V was driven from The Hague, or fled. The Patriot fervor, however, rather quickly dissipated. Splits between Patriots and anti-Patriots, and within the Patriot groups themselves, weakened the movement. The Prussians delivered the *coup de grâce*, sending an army of 26,000 troops into the Republic in September 1787 to restore Willem V; the Patriot Revolution ended in a whimper.⁴⁹

Parallel to these more political forms of patriotism, there existed in Amsterdam, as in the larger Republic, a type that more closely replicated the type of patriotism expressed in Hamburg's 1765 Patriotic Society, and was to be found in many other urban centers. While these various societies resembled one another and drew on European-wide shifts in cultural, political, social, and economic life, local circumstances called forth particular organizations or endowed

⁴⁶ Israel, 1067–78, quote 1074; Elias-2, 215–32, quotes 226–7; Frijhoff/Prak-2, 328–34; Nico J. J. de Voogd, *De doelistenbeweging te Amsterdam in 1748* (Utrecht: De Vroede, 1914).

⁴⁷ Joan Derk van der Capellen, *An het Volk van Nederland* (Ostend: n.p., 1781).

⁴⁸ Israel, 1098–9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1098–115; Frijhoff/Prak-2, 353–69; Nico C. F. van Sas, "The Patriot Revolution: New Perspectives," in Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand Mijnhardt (eds.), *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 91–122; Klein, *Patriots republikenisme*; Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*. For a detailed look at the Patriot movement in Deventer during the 1780s, see Wayne te Brake, *Regents and Rebels: The Revolutionary World of an Eighteenth-Century Dutch City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

them with special characteristics, thus complicating and fracturing the general pattern. Critical in Amsterdam, as earlier in Hamburg, was the perceived stagnation of the economy.⁵⁰ Over the course of the eighteenth century, societies became more reformist in their outlook and ambitions. The *Economic Section of the Dutch Society* formed in 1777 concerned itself with reanimating economic life in the Republic.⁵¹ Most famous was the Society for the Public Good. One of its largest branches opened in Amsterdam. Established during the Patriot agitation in 1784, its purpose, like that of the Hamburg society, focused on harnessing private initiative to public good, in particular, seeking to initiate and foster a reformation of manners and morals among the lower social groups and, especially, encourage initiatives that would revive economic life.

Unlike the Hamburg Patriotic Society, that boasted as members a large number of men powerful in government such as syndics, senators, and aldermen, the Dutch Society was the first one set up without initial regent participation. Moreover, in the 1780s and later, the Dutch Society developed an orientation toward a national culture that rather obviously remained missing in Hamburg, although there, too, a sense of a Hanseatic identity also grew perceptibly. The Dutch Society, like other reform-minded groups, admitted that it must “maneuver very cautiously” in order to preserve its political neutrality while simultaneously “seeking to inspire reforms.” The relationship of the branches of the society to the several layers of Dutch government differed from the very close links the Hamburg Patriotic Society maintained with its governing elite. One cannot simply use any one of a number of historical labels alone, such as patriotic, democratic, or oppositional, to characterize it. Nor was it an organization that primarily fought against an establishment of aristocratic regents, stadhouders, or the church. The relationships prove far more complicated and fluid.⁵²

Curiously, one hunts in vain for evidence of similar societies in Antwerp; similar *sentiments* clearly existed. Considering the economic difficulties the city experienced in the early eighteenth century, one might well expect a reform movement to have coalesced. Initiatives for improvements, attempts to revive commerce, and to create better social welfare schemes, for example, came late and often emanated from the central government in Brussels or from Vienna directly. The associational landscape in the German states and also, if somewhat

⁵⁰ Wijnand Mijnhardt, *Tot heil van 't menschdom: Culturele genootschappen in Nederland, 1750–1815* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 79.

⁵¹ The two groups, however, did not necessarily agree on the best way to achieve economic improvement, whether through free trade or increased domestic production. Johan Bierens de Haan, *Van Oeconomische Tak tot Nederlandsche Maatschappij voor Nijverheid en Handel 1777–1952* (Harlem: Willink, 1952); Mijnhardt, *Tot heil*, 109. On the coalescence of a Hanseatic identity or sense of a “Hanseatic solidarity” in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Hamburg, see Aaslestad, *Place and Politics*, 203–44.

⁵² Israel, 1065–6; Mijnhardt, *Tot heil*, 111, 116, 265–6.

later, in the Dutch Republic, was far more densely populated than in the southern Netherlands. Other than the existence of some freemason lodges, the number of “useful” organizations remained virtually at nil for the eighteenth century in Antwerp (as throughout the southern Netherlands). There seems to have been no such group established until the founding in 1788 of the *Society for the Promotion of the (Fine) Arts*.⁵³ Reasons for this absence are speculative; it is always difficult to explain a lack. One might suggest that the initiatives of the central government forestalled or frustrated more independent ventures. Although fears of economic decline spurred efforts in the Dutch Republic, perhaps the far greater economic troubles of the Austrian Netherlands had a dampening rather than an energizing effect.

Practical politicking

If broad, strongly held, yet vaguely expressed, political concepts like republicanism, patriotism, and civism (or civic virtue) formed the ideological matrix of politics, their concrete expressions – how politics proceeded on a day-to-day basis – only haphazardly followed ideologically driven programs. Rather, the solution of immediate problems and individual situations usually set the rhythms to which political life moved. Clearly, the rhetoric of republicanism, patriotism, or civic virtue formed elements in these quotidian political actions and were frequently deployed. They were never meaningless, but their meanings shifted as situations arose. Political life, too, often took place at several levels and in various ways. Here the focus is on what may be called the locations of political participation and the actions taken there in addition to considering the discourses people used when articulating political goals or explaining political actions. One location was the public sphere which, *pace* Habermas, existed long before the eighteenth century. Other significant political localities included parishes, wards, militia quarters, and law courts. Early modern urban political culture coalesced around certain actions, at certain movements, and in the day-to-day business of political negotiation. One can argue that actions, not words, counted most, but the division is highly artificial and what people wrote about their political experiences was never irrelevant nor can it be relegated to the realm of mere rhetoric.

⁵³ Hilde Greefs notes that “We find very few references to such societies in Antwerp in the eighteenth century.” “Ondernemers en de genootschappen: Een onderzoek naar het gezelschapsleven te Antwerpen tussen 1796–1830,” *BTG* 75 (1992): 4n8. The much older work of Willem Schepmans, *Geschiedenis onzer maatschappijen* (Antwerp: Burton, 1925), 4 also remarks that the number of associations in the Austrian Netherlands was “much smaller than that in neighboring lands.” Freemason lodges were more frequently found; the earliest of these was established in Mons in 1721. Two lodges were set up in Antwerp in 1776 and then in 1784; there existed thirteen in Brussels between 1740 and 1784. Hugo de Schampeleire, *De Antwerpse vrijmetselaars in de 18de eeuw* (Brussels: VUB, 1968).

Practical politics, moreover, reached rather deep down into the citizenry. Obviously, not everyone enjoyed the same possibilities for participation in political life; by no means all citizens enjoyed equal enfranchisement. The degree of inclusion varied considerably from city to city, but also from time to time; external circumstances widened or narrowed political apertures. Important instances here, for example, were the relative potency of the Dutch stadhouder, the continued inability of the Austrian Habsburgs to open the Scheldt to navigation, or the persistent claims of the Danes on Hamburg's sovereignty and territory. The degree of actual, or desirable, accessibility to office occasioned at times considerable political rancor and even tumult. It is difficult to know, moreover, what expectations groups and individuals held. Apparently, many people remained perfectly content to have little or nothing to do with politics, whether written with a capital "P" or a lower case one. Others achieved all they wanted by activities in local, neighborhood organizations, such as the civic militias, parish organs, guilds, or other such associations. The criticality of what can usefully be referred to as the informal political process, could include demonstrations in the streets, pressure exerted by guilds, and the like, but also engaged a large number of people who either benefited from political plums, if small ones, or assumed official duties at the lowest levels.⁵⁴

Two major political issues in all three cities, however, involved the question of access to lower municipal offices and to jobs and placements that provided the livelihood for thousands. They were, in a broad sense, politically determined. Much more is said about these in the discussion of corruption in [Chapter 3](#). Here, however, we want to look at how contemporaries negotiated politics daily. An understanding of how things worked in, for example, the Amsterdam vroedschap, the Antwerp schepenvank, and the Hamburg Senate and Bürgerschaft, offers clues to the meaning of politics and to the entire register of political expectations. While high-level politicking does not track perfectly with what occurred at lower levels, it is not logical to assume that the motivations driving prominent political actors remained alien to bit players.

Even at the elevated levels of government what we wish to know often remains hard to detect. Major councils met behind closed doors. While secretaries always attended and recorded proceedings, what made it onto paper never, or only rarely, detailed the discussions that occurred or allowed a peek behind the scenes. Occasionally, it is true, the documentation reveals the objections raised by one or another member. Sometimes, complaints from other organs of government, diplomatic representatives, and miscellaneous

⁵⁴ This involved "ordinary people who were 'beneficiaries' [*beneficianten*] in the service of the town, such as weigh-officers, wheat-carriers, bargemen, and peat- and beer-carriers," and the "modes of informal political pressure varied with class and gender; and all these forms were mobilized in the course of the seventeenth century, in council chambers, guilds halls, and city streets." Henk van Nierop, "Politics and the People of Amsterdam," in Peter van Kessel and Elisja Schulte (eds.), *Rome * Amsterdam: Two Growing Cities in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 161, 167.

individuals have been “read into the minutes.” Overwhelmingly, however, proceedings were, if not exactly secret, closely held.⁵⁵ Councillors always exhibited a “great disinclination” to commit things to paper “black on white” and thus expose what took place before decisions were reached. Clerks and secretaries employed a “remarkable sobriety of expression” to conceal “often protracted [and] sometimes stormy deliberations.” Bontemantel, for instance, recorded that after one especially venomous exchange, the members of the *vroedschap* agreed “that what happened should . . . not be allowed out of the room.” This discretion may first seem an all-too-obvious manifestation of a closed and chummy old boys’ network. Nonetheless, other reasons existed for maintaining a confidentiality verging on secrecy and deliberate concealment: to encourage freedom of speech within the councils under the motto “*verba volant, scripta manent*” – “Spoken words fly away, written words remain.”⁵⁶

The internal workings of these bodies continued to be opaque to contemporaries as well as to later generations of historians. Of course, one can often locate elsewhere in the archives more detailed reports that formed the basis for discussions in the *vroedschap*, magistracy, or Senate. In rare lucky cases, an informed reporter pierced the curtain of silence. Although these eye-witnesses had their own foibles and sometimes very large axes to grind, they nonetheless provide valuable insight into what happened in these *sancta sanctorum* of power. While the personal portraits they drew sometimes prove untrustworthy, the more mundane issues of daily political life show through. These articulate record-keepers possess yet another virtue; they were never solely amanuenses, they participated in what they recorded. Examining the constitution and context of these sources, and probing the backgrounds of the men who penned them, simultaneously opens closed political doors and reveals the structures of contemporary politicking.

Amsterdam is especially well served in this respect. Hans Bontemantel (1613–88) belonged to the *vroedschap* for almost twenty years (1653–72). Bontemantel is well known to Dutch historians; virtually all histories of late seventeenth-century Amsterdam draw on his invaluable “notes” (*aanteekeningen*) that described the government of Amsterdam from an insider’s point of view. His detailed observations depict the machinery of government in action, expose the intrigues behind the selection of magistrates, bare intralite conflicts, and vividly portray the personalities of important men in the Amsterdam government such as the mighty, nine-times burgomaster Gillis Valckenier (a virtual Dutch “sultan”), his colleague in office Cornelis Geelvinck (whose wealth came from supplying the India Companies), and Isaac Coymans (a merchant eventually banished for his activities in illegally establishing the Danish Africa Company). Bontemantel provides equally fascinating and pertinent information on the daily grind of politics within the *vroedschap*, “in

⁵⁵ See Bruin, *Geheimhouding en verraad*.

⁵⁶ Nicolaas de Roever, “Tweeërlei regenten,” *Oud-Holland* 7 (1889): 63–4; Bontemantel, 2: 116.

the tiniest peculiarities,” even if some of his more caustic comments may be attributed to the premature termination of his own political career.⁵⁷ Likewise useful, if far less rich and extensive, are the memoirs and “secret reports” of Joachim van Rendorp from the Patriot Period of the 1780s; he was five times burgomaster in the 1780s and early 1790s.⁵⁸

Once we exit the *vroedschap*, information on daily politicking becomes scarcer, although the diary of Jacob Bicker Raye and a careful reading of his almost obsessive entries projects a suggestive picture of how a lesser political creature and a sinecure-holder perceived the workings of politics broadly conceived and accommodated himself to them.⁵⁹ Bicker Raye’s family, originally Walloon refugees who became citizens in the late sixteenth century, did not belong to the regent elite, yet was closely enough related to them “to catch the crumbs that fell from the regents’ table.” Jacob’s older brother, Joan, was a ship’s captain and then, in 1718, received the office of auctioneer at the Great Fish Market. This post provided a considerable income although a substitute did the actual work. Jacob himself made a hearty meal of crumbs that maintained his comfortable lifestyle. In 1723, he became Collector of the Excise on peat and coal and in 1729 he moved up a bit in rank to bookkeeper of the office responsible for supervising the grain trade, a position he exercised, apparently personally, until 1763. His patron was the burgomaster Lieve Geelvinck, a fairly distant relative. The first post brought him an annual income of *f*1615. To receive it, he had to lay down a surety of *f*3000.

In 1736, a better office opened up. When his brother vacated the position of auctioneer to become governor of the colony of Surinam, a blood-relative of the family, the burgomaster Balthasar Scott, saw to it that Jacob stepped into his brother’s shoes. A paid substitute did this work, too, and Jacob received 2½ percent of the cost of all fish sold for an average of about *f*500 a month;

⁵⁷ Hans Bontemantel (1613–88) was a merchant and long-time member of the Amsterdam regents. He supported Johan de Witt’s states party and thus he, along with nine other regents, was removed from office by Willem III in 1672. *Hans Bontemantel, de regeeringe van Amsterdam soo in ’t civiel als crimineel en militaire (1653–1672)*, ed. Gerhard Wilhelm Kernkamp (2 vols. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1897); Hans Bontemantel, *Notulen gehouden ter vergadering der Staten van Holland in 1670*, ed. Conradus Gerardus Smit (Utrecht: Broeckhoff, 1937). Quote, Bontemantel, 1: xxxi.

⁵⁸ Joachim Rendorp, *Memoiren dienende tot opheldering, van het gebeurde, gedurende den laatsten Engelschen oorlog* (2 vols.; Amsterdam: Johannes Allart, 1792) and August Wilhelm von Schlegel (ed.), *Joachim Rendorps geheime Nachrichten* (Leipzig: n.p., 1793).

⁵⁹ Selections from Bicker Raye’s diary were published in *Het dagboek van Jacob Bicker Raye 1732–1772*, ed. Frederik Beijeren and Michelle G. de Boer (2nd printing; Amsterdam: Paris Beaux-Arts, 1939). A more recent selection with commentary is: Machiel Bosman, comp., *De polsslag van de stad: De Amsterdamse stadskroniek van Jacob Bicker Raye* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 2009). In 1997–8, I used the complete manuscript of the diary, available in SA, *Dagboek Bicker Raye*, “Notitie van het merkwaardigste, mij bekend, dat er is voorgevallen binnen de stad Amsterdam, zijn begin nemende met het jaar 1732 en eindigende met het jaar 1772.”

sometimes he pulled down twice that amount. In 1736, he became a captain in the civic militia and remained so until dismissed by Willem IV in 1748 in a purge that removed the last of Geelvinck's group (Geelvinck had died in 1743).⁶⁰

Bicker Raye's career presented nothing remarkable. Like many office-holders in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Amsterdam, he was a worker bee and a place-holder simultaneously. He benefited from connections, but, for that matter, so, too did his substitutes. His proxy at the excise from 1725 to 1772 was one Abraham Hartman. Bicker Raye described him both as a "very generous" but also an "insolent and greedy" person, who had acquired a number of profitable positions over time.⁶¹ Bicker Raye's patrons, of course, received "gratifications" for exerting their influence, yet money formed only one incentive. The careful tending of patronage-clientage networks such as these and the delicate calculation of how to distribute offices in a way that won more friends than creating enemies (for everyone who received a job, someone else or several others did not) constituted a key part of practical politicking that reached up and down the social ladder. Thus, Bicker Raye's life history reflects the career of a relatively minor figure in the administrative and political life of Amsterdam, but it also reveals the ways in which politics proceeded and the dimensions of political participation.

Unfortunately, no Hamburg Bontemantel existed. Several other sources, if ones lacking the intimacy and immediacy of Bontemantel's knowledge, open up the internal mechanics of Hamburg's government to some degree and show how persons and groups brokered deals and exerted influence. Here, too, because of the deeply individualized character of government, the flow between the highest realms of politics and far more ordinary people appears repeatedly and constitutes a major portion of political business. Bontemantel's notes were not meant for publication; they remained in manuscript until 1897.⁶² The best witness to the inner workings of Hamburg's government, the syndic Johann Klefeker, always intended to publish his description. Klefeker's *Collection Concerning Hamburg's Laws and Its Constitutions in Civil, Religious, Financial, Mercantile, and its other Policies* appeared in twelve volumes between 1765 and 1774.⁶³ This massive accomplishment, however, took a considerably different form from Bontemantel's comments; the former was historical and analytical, the latter personal, contemporary, and judgmental. Klefeker witnessed years of political practice in Hamburg and the work reflects that intimate knowledge. While Klefeker's *Collection* provides an invaluable guide to Hamburg's

⁶⁰ *Dagboek*, v–vi. ⁶¹ *Dagboek*, v–vi; Frijhoff/Prak-2, 345–6.

⁶² The manuscript itself was, however, by no means unknown nor did it lie unused on a dusty shelf until the last years of the nineteenth century. See Kernkamp's introduction to Bontemantel.

⁶³ Johann Klefeker, *Sammlung der Hamburgischen Gesetze und Verfassung in Bürger- und Kirchlichen, auch Cammer-, Handlungs- und übrigen Policy-Angelegenheiten und Geschäften samt historischen Einleitungen* (12 vols.; Hamburg: Piscator, 1765–74).

administration and history, it is neither only a compendium nor an impersonal commentary. No historian of early modern Hamburg can do without it. For fifty years, from 1725 until his death in late 1775, Klefeker was legal advisor to the Hamburg Senate and attended Senate meetings. Syndics had a wide range of duties and were powerful figures, although they possessed only a consultative vote; all had to be lawyers. Few people were more familiar with the ins and outs of Hamburg's constitution, its laws and traditions, than the four syndics.⁶⁴

A very different, if equally informative, work created a sensation in Hamburg when it appeared in 1781. Ludwig von Heß, a Swedish state councilor resident in Hamburg, published the texts of the 1712 Principal Recess that formed Hamburg's constitution until 1860. It had never been previously made public in its entirety although many of its provisions had surely become well known. In the introduction to the text, Heß sharply criticized the 1712 compromise, pointing out the continued, grave abuses in administration (nepotism in the Senate and in distribution of offices) and in justice (the Senate's "arrogation" of juridical powers properly belonging to the citizenry).⁶⁵ The Senate reacted with iron-fisted alacrity, immediately ordering the copies confiscated and destroyed; it was burned on the executioner's block. According to the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of 5 July 1782, however, "the book published by Herr von Heß that is so hated by the Hamburg magistracy [was] joyously taken up by the citizenry who sought after it with so much enthusiasm that within three days 500 copies had completely sold out."⁶⁶ Heß's text of the Principal Recess with his introduction is a political document of considerable value and one that sheds light on many intricacies of government.

Two members of the Hamburg Senate during the troubles of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries allow yet other perspectives on governmental operations at several levels. During the period of virtual civil war during 1682–6, the Bürgermeister Johann Schulte penned a series of letters to his son, a merchant in Lisbon, in which he relayed news of events as they unfolded in Hamburg.⁶⁷ Another useful source has a totally different nature,

⁶⁴ *Sammlung der Jubelschriften, welcher der 50jährigen Amts-Jubelfeyer Sr. Magnificenz des Herrn Johann Klefeker, Protosyndicus der Republik Hamburg den 6ten Julius 1775 von biesigen und auswärtigen Verehrern des Klefekerischen Namens und der Klefekerischen Verdienste gewidmet worden sind* (Hamburg: Schröder, 1775); Martin Ewald, *Der Hamburgische Senatssyndicus: Eine verwaltungsgeschichtliche Studie* (Hamburg: Kommissionsverlag Ludwig Appel, 1954).

⁶⁵ Ludwig von Heß, *Unwiederrufliches Fundamental-Gesetz, Regimentsform, oder Haupt-Recess der Stadt Hamburg . . . Mit einer Einleitung* (n.p. [Hamburg]: n.p., 1781; the second edition appeared in 1782. It was the second edition that was confiscated and burned.

⁶⁶ Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge*, 173–5, quote 175.

⁶⁷ Johann Schulte, *Briefe des Hamburgischen Bürgermeisters Johann Schulte an seinen in Lissabon etablirten Sohn Johann Schulte: Geschrieben in den Jahren 1680–1685* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1856). Schulte and his letters, with excerpts, are discussed in Gustav Freytag (ed.), *Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit* (4 vols.; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1919–20), 3: 365–85.

although it was also composed, or rather compiled, by a Hamburg senator, Henning Lochau, from 1710 to 1722. Throughout his adult life, Lochau zealously collected books, paintings, coins, and medallions. Moreover, his library possessed a rich collection of “rare Hamburgensia”: a vast number of pamphlets, broadsheets, and flyers, mostly printed but some in manuscript form. These ephemera have proven a gold mine of information for historians of the period if for no other reason than that the Great Fire of 1842 literally burned large holes through the documentary record.⁶⁸

Lochau's collection, now bound in twenty-one thick omnibus volumes in the Hamburg *Staatsarchiv*, contains literally hundreds of individual pamphlets touching on the multitude of matters large and small that busied the Senate and the *Bürgerschaft* in these years. These materials themselves are invaluable sources, but Lochau's handwritten comments reveal every bit as much. Recorded on the title-pages or in the margins, Lochau explained the circumstances that provoked the publication of one or another pamphlet, how they were distributed (“handed out to people on the way to church” or “pressed in the hands of those going to a meeting of the *Bürgerschaft*”) and indicating the frequency and the speed with which they appeared and circulated. Lochau, moreover, often helpfully filled in the blanks, clarifying situations not necessarily or immediately obvious from the content of the works themselves or untangling the hidden machinations and individual relationships that produced them. His tiny, neat handwriting furnishes us with a close look at the dynamics of day-to-day politicking. A pamphlet that came to the attention of the *Bürgerschaft* on 14 July (and that had been quickly printed just the previous evening) was, for example, “burned on the next day” on the demand of one outraged, distinguished man “because he had been viciously attacked in it.” Many pamphlets were passed around during the actual meetings of the *Bürgerschaft* as Lochau's marginalia make clear. In addition, Lochau observed when pasquinades caused “much turmoil” in, and outside, the *Bürgerschaft*. Likewise, Lochau frequently identified actors, explained their connections, illuminated hidden motives, and revealed the author of the pamphlet (or at least the putative one). In addition, Lochau apparently made a determined effort to locate and acquire pamphlets from earlier in the seventeenth century. Thus his collection richly depicts the events of the 1660s through the 1680s, a time when he was not even in Hamburg, although the size of the collection swells (and his useful commentaries become more frequent and expansive) from the 1690s onward. Before he was selected senator in 1710,

⁶⁸ Although the Great Fire did enormous damage to the city's archives, much was restored through the work of two archivists, especially Otto Beneke. He not only reconstructed parts of the archive from other holdings, he also reorganized what had been saved from the conflagration. All scholars who use the documents from that period are familiar with Beneke's tight, neat handwriting. “Beneke, Otto,” in *ADB*; Renate Hauschild-Thiessen, “Das Archiv, seine Besucher und Benutzer zur Zeit von Otto Beneke,” *ZVHG* 83 (1997): 115–32.

he was a member of the *Bürgerschaft* and thus eye-witnessed occurrences there.⁶⁹

These sources make clear that only by probing the day-to-day workings of government do we gain a realistic picture of early modern political life. Major domestic and international situations threw up a wealth of material. Just as fruitful for unraveling political dynamics, however, are the individual cases that lay behind and constituted many crises. Such an investigation allows one to recreate the pathways followed, but also facilitates an appreciation of the ways in which individual incidents and affairs shaped governing. In addition, of course, it reveals how elites dealt with a broader population. Perhaps even more interesting, these individual circumstances uncover the true face of early modern politicking: the expectations but also the actions of those who had less, little, or no immediate political power.⁷⁰

Political styles

Style in government, if one may so term it, is a subject difficult to approach historically. To understand political styles, and their importance, one must focus first on the individual moments of political life, the incidents that required immediate attention and that generated many ad hoc solutions. This dictum does not require one to reject the possibility of actors developing long-term stances or even political philosophies. Firmly held political views rarely drove politics in these cities just as time-honored mercantile precepts did not always drive commercial life. Even though persistent and repeated divisions over the meaning of “true freedom” (*ware vryheid*) in Amsterdam, tussling over centralization attempts and in defense of Brabant “liberties” in Antwerp, and quarrels over the relative powers of the *Bürgerschaft* vis-à-vis the Senate in Hamburg ran like proverbial red threads through generations, decades, and even centuries, their manifestations metamorphosed. Certain issues repeatedly bred or reignited conflict, yet the triggering moments remained individual even if they profoundly molded governmental styles. In Hamburg, for example, in 1618, occasion for conflict “repeatedly arose from the offenses committed by

⁶⁹ Henning Lochau was born in 1664 in Hamburg. He studied law at German and foreign universities; in Orléans he became a licentiat of “both laws.” He traveled extensively throughout Europe and returned to Hamburg around 1689. In 1710 he was elected a member of the Senate and married the daughter of a *Bürgermeister*. He died in 1722. See “Lochau, Henning” in *Schriftstellerlexikon und Herrn Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbachs Merkwürdige Reise durch niedersachsen, Holland und Engelland* (3 vols.; Ulm: Johann Friedrich Gaum, 1753), 2: 98–101. His collection is preserved in StAHbg, Bibliothek as “Acta Hamburgensien” [=“Lochau Sammlung”], omnibus vols. 201–21.

⁷⁰ Thomas Max Safley, in his examination of early modern bankruptcies, makes a similar point about the criticality of individual cases. He concludes that “[h]istorians need to turn their attention to microhistorical patterns of business organization and practice in order to determine their macrohistorical influence on business and economy in the past.” “Business Failure and Civil Scandal in Early Modern Europe,” *BHR* 83 (2009): 60.

individual senators” especially concerning the exercise of justice. This was not a new story. Rivalries and personal animosities flared and died down but never vanished. The remnants sedimentized, cementing themselves in political life and then later, and almost inevitably, resurfaced. Old injuries festered, while some issues remained open and aching wounds.

One should, however, be cautious not to overestimate the confrontational and conflictual side of politics in these decades. Obviously, controversy deposits thicker, richer strata of information than do compromise and cooperation; that reality inevitably blurs the picture. During the closing decade of the Thirty Years War, for instance, “internal political questions were scarcely debated” in Hamburg; but they hardly disappeared.⁷¹

Even when political life seemed largely composed of clashes between two obdurate fronts, such as in the ongoing battles between the parties of true freedom and the stadhouder in Amsterdam, between the demands of central government in Brussels and the defense of urban liberties mounted by the Broad Council in Antwerp, or in the constitutional wrangling and civic violence of the late seventeenth century in Hamburg, conflict “required no landmark differences of position.” Indeed, “[little] daily incidents were quite enough to provoke the ill-will and enmity that . . . poisoned the [political] atmosphere.” Thus, an understanding of practical politics rests on a comprehension of the criticality of such day-to-day events, these “1001 things”⁷² that busied and tormented magistracies. What incidents actually meant, how they were negotiated, and why contemporaries endowed them with importance are crucial aspects of any understanding of political life. Equally central is the perhaps obvious fact that any division between private and public affairs was hard to maintain, even if the concept existed. Lochau, for example, in discussing his arrangement of the pamphlets in the volume covering 1699, explained the inevitable tessellation of private affairs and public matters. While he feared that the mix might “confound” some readers, he believed the arrangement necessary and instructive: “not only especially because *publica* and *Privata* entwined” but also because “the links between public matters remained obscure without understanding the private affairs” associated with them.⁷³

Literally hundreds of individual cases reveal the workings of practical politics. Such cases are not *merely* illustrative; they *constituted* practical politics in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. Quotidian politicking in the councils of government brought together men with much in common: political ambitions, social and economic backgrounds, and family relations. At least theoretically

⁷¹ Gisela Rückleben, “Rat und Bürgerschaft in Hamburg 1595–1686: Innere Bindungen und Gegensätze” (dissertation, Marburg am Lahn, 1969), 46, 69, 111.

⁷² Boumans, writing on Antwerp, refers to “the 1001 things that the magistracy handled,” 1711. The same held true for Amsterdam and Hamburg, if perhaps in even greater numbers.

⁷³ Rückleben, “Rat und Bürgerschaft,” 59; Lochau’s handwritten note, in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol. 209.

colleagues in office interacted in “friendship and harmony.” Unsurprisingly, such pacific circumstances did not always pertain and, while much of the give-and-take must have been polite and equable, moments of difference revealed greater animosities and larger interests, ones often economic or commercial in nature. Battles frequently became intense and occasionally physically violent. Besides quietly manipulating and scheming, colleagues resorted to verbal attacks. Factional struggles brewed up over single incidents, personal hatreds, and even demeanor. Such in-fighting was rarely just petty; single incidents and seeming trifles provoked bigger conflicts and long-lasting bitterness. Obviously, these trivialities were themselves sometimes only the froth that signaled deeper currents of enmity, difference, or distrust. One can point, for example, to the Calvinist (or “strict reformed”) and Libertine factions in the Amsterdam *vroedschap* that personal dislikes, family quarrels, and fribbling jealousies greatly exacerbated. One might argue that these larger issues were the real ones and the others just symptoms, but that sharp, apparently rational division unacceptably separates style and substance in ways as foreign to early modern governors as to early modern merchants.

Major decisions in the Amsterdam *vroedschap*, such as the city’s position vis-à-vis the stadhouder, ideas of “true freedom,” alliances with foreign powers, as well as internal matters such as the selection of colleagues, the regulation of the East India Company, the appointment of its directors, religious policies, and the designating of men and women to fill the wide variety of posts in the city, jostled with insults and jabs of a personal nature. Careful reading of the works of contemporary observers like Bontemantel or of later local historians, like Johan Elias, who possessed an unrivaled familiarity with the sources, however, reveals these moments as integral – not incidental – to the workings of politics.

Verbal sparring in the *vroedschap* often became acidulous and even downright crude. Personalities varied, of course. Irenic mediators and cooler heads sought to smooth ruffled feathers, build compromises, and defuse conflict. Apparently, one great conciliator was the powerful burgomaster, Cornelis de Graeff, praised by contemporaries as establishing a “wise and moderate regime” in the 1650s.⁷⁴ But there were also those men whom one angered or defied at one’s peril; men whom contemporaries regarded as rough, raw, and even violent, who browbeat their colleagues into submission. “Disturbances,” “harsh words,” and “disrespectful speech,” proved all too common. Matters could threaten to dissolve into physical attacks, and sometimes did.⁷⁵ Of course, there were always limits to how much animosity it was prudent to evoke; someone who spewed too much bile ran the risk of galvanizing opposition against him. Obviously, the favors a powerful burgomaster like Gillis Valckenier or

⁷⁴ Elias-2, 146.

⁷⁵ Bontemantel, 2: 156–7. A quarrel between a burgomaster and sheriff in Amsterdam in 1671 caused the bystanders to worry that such could produce “action” (*fytelijckheyt*). *Ibid.*, 155.

Andries Bicker could distribute did much to win them adherents if not friends. Other tools of power could be used to keep enemies off balance and to cow opponents; sharp words were one frequently deployed tactic. In such a political situation, one should not underestimate the impact of personality and personal traits nor the value of *ad hominem* strikes at a man's (or his family members') honor, religion, lifestyle, or business.

Of course, it is virtually impossible from the distance of a few hundred years to scratch through layers of praise and censure to discover the real person underneath and to assess their virtues and vices. Fortunately, it is unnecessary because both the real and the rhetorical person counted equally. For example, the pamphlet literature projects a wide range of judgments on the powerful Bicker brothers. For critics, they were an "ignorant, arrogant, and insufferable" pack as hungry for money as they were for power. They had woven such a tight web of preference and obligation that "it would be difficult to name a single major office, either in or outside Amsterdam, that had not been brokered by the Bickers or their relations." Others panegyrized the three brothers as "irreproachable in their lives, in their trade, and interactions [with others], alert for the well-being of their city."⁷⁶ Which was true? Probably both, possibly neither. Likewise, Gillis Valckenier, who dominated the vroedschap in the 1660s and 1670s was choleric and often used the force of his personality to bend colleagues to his will. One opponent, the burgomaster Hendrik Hooft, called Valckenier "a knave" and accused him of engineering the government change-over in 1672 that overturned the sitting magistracy to Valckenier's personal benefit. In 1673, Hooft refused to be considered for the position of burgomaster because he would have Valckenier as his colleague.

Valckenier rarely hesitated to disparage, insult, or verbally brutalize those who opposed him. He charged one man with corrupt practices and threatened to ruin him and "his two goofy sons." The aged burgomaster Nicolaes Tulp, he insulted as "an ignorant flatterer"; he scolded another as a "sponger." When he fell out with Valckenier, his one-time right-hand man, Cornelis Geelvinck, found himself described as a "a rascal and a rogue" and also accused of fraud.⁷⁷ Valckenier's attacks could be more substantial, especially against powerful opponents such as the De Graeff family. For the 1674–5 collection of the 200th penny tax, Valckenier manipulated the assessments to his family's favor and his enemies' disadvantage (at least according to Bontemantel). The estates of his nephew and his son-in-law were vastly under-valued while the property of his political opposite, Andries de Graeff (and his sister), was enormously over-taxed.⁷⁸

Valckenier was a larger-than-life figure with a penchant for strong words and actions. If his manner and political style seem extreme it is because they were, but they still only lay at the far end of a spectrum of verbal intimidation.

⁷⁶ Knuttel, 6851, 6836; Elias-2, 119–20. ⁷⁷ Elias-2, 163, 174, 182.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 101, 103, 157, 177; also Bontemantel, 2: 153.



FIGURE 3 Gillis Valckenier (1623–90), Burgomaster of Amsterdam.

There were many other examples of similarly harsh behavior and language in the *vroedschap* that make them part of a common political style. Even after informal, and then formal, agreements were reached to distribute offices and to lessen factionalism, such battles, in large and small formats, continued. Indeed, the very “Unity Concept” Valckenier forwarded in 1676 provoked a strong rebuttal in vigorous, even inflammatory language; Hooft, for instance, spoke of “unheard-of practices.” After a particularly crass manipulation of a burgomaster election in 1654, when charges of all sorts flew – corruption in the administration of the West India Company, for example – one man who had lost out complained loudly during the traditional benediction that “why should we pray when such skulduggery goes on?”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Elias-2, 181; Bontemantel, 2: 111.

Typical also were the ways in which administrative, political, and mercantile politics bled into one another. An obvious set of examples comes from situations, like the one discussed above, involving the India companies, their directors, and employees with larger affairs of state. Such entanglements proved impossible to avoid in a *vroedschap* whose membership was practically coequal with the directors of the India companies. In 1659, Isaac Coymans, a merchant with the West India Company, collaborated with two members of the Amsterdam *vroedschap*, Nicolaes Pancras and Hendrik Carloff, to establish a Glückstadter Africa Company. When Coymans schemed to involve the West India Company in a war with Denmark in order to benefit this new enterprise and its backers, he found himself charged with treason. Accused of conducting a secret correspondence with Joost Kamer, the resident of the Danish Africa Company at Cabo Corso on the west coast of Africa, he was brought to trial. His supporters in the *vroedschap* saved him from the death penalty; he was, however, condemned to six years in prison and eternal banishment. When the States General of Holland protested the leniency of this sentence and attempted to extradite Coymans, friends of Pancras in the *vroedschap* stalled the procedure until it died. Bontemantel vividly describes the backdoor politicking that occurred, including the attempts of several well-placed women to obtain mercy for Coymans by visiting, in his home, the extremely influential Heer van Zuidpolsbroek, that is, Cornelis de Graeff, who was ten times burgomaster and four times presiding burgomaster. When Coymans's erstwhile partner, Pancras, himself became burgomaster, the penalty of banishment was lifted. Such "ceaseless sometime risible intriguers" went on to achieve political preferments as well as financial benefits. Their machinations did not go unremarked or unopposed either in the *vroedschap* or in the more public arena of print.⁸⁰

Because no Bontemantel recorded with like assiduity and fidelity what transpired in the meetings of the Hamburg Senate, we lack such an immediate accounting. The Lochau collection, however, yields up much information on similar conflicts that appeared in print; plenty of published nastiness made the rounds in Amsterdam and Antwerp as well. If one starts at the top of the political pyramid in Hamburg, one can use the case of Senator Johann von Spreckelsen to demonstrate how his personal troubles tangled with constitutional issues. His own actions raised broader issues that lay at the base of turmoils that arose repeatedly from 1663 through 1712. In just half a century, five different imperial commissions came to Hamburg to defuse conflict.

⁸⁰ Bontemantel, ccii–ccvii, 1: 264–72, 2: 377–406. This case, too, provoked a series of pamphlets, for and against Coymans, see *t'Samen-spraek, Tusschen een Hollantsch ende Brabantsch Koopman, Omtrent de Negotie van desen tijdt* (Dordrecht: D. Brichtmann, 1662), Knuttel 8646; *Brieven, Confessie; Mitgaders/ Advisen Van verscheyden Rechtsgeleerden in de saeck van ISAAC COYMANS gegeven: als mede de Sententie Daer op gevolgt* (Rotterdam: Dirck Iansz., 1662), in SA, Bibliothek, F Coymans, also Knuttel 8644; Johan E. Elias discusses the affair in "Het geslacht Pancras," *Amsterdamsch Jaarboekje* (1898): 133–43, quote 137.

In 1663, an imperial-brokered Recess had established a College of Fifty-Two to reform the practice of justice in the city. At that moment, Spreckelsen was the senator charged with administering justice. He adamantly refused to implement or adhere to the changes that the Fifty-Two desired. As a result, the *Bürgerschaft* removed him from office and expelled him from the Senate. The right of the *Bürgerschaft* to do so formed the major constitutional issue. The *Bürgerschaft's* ability to dismiss senators was tantamount to acknowledging that sovereignty in the city ultimately lay with the *Bürgerschaft*; a claim the Senate fought tooth and nail. The *Bürgermeister* Peter Lütken protested against this “unseemly behavior” that, in his opinion, violated proper procedures. Open warfare broke out with Lütken and Spreckelsen (and most of the Senate, as well) on one side and the *Bürgerschaft* on the other. One lawyer, a member of the Fifty-Two, Jacob Mors, represented the *Bürgerschaft* vigorously; the battle repeatedly revived over the entire decade and well into the 1670s. If this conflict seems to possess clear ideological ramifications, that impression deceives. It did not signal “the prelude to a grand ideological confrontation,” but rather “a mutual reworking of [ideas of] authority for the accomplishment of real day-to-day political claims.” It served, therefore, to promote “certain individual demands of one side or the other.”⁸¹ These issues can be untangled by looking more closely at the persons involved and examining their positions and why they held them.

The political biographies of Lütken and von Spreckelsen reveal several critical dimensions of political life in Hamburg. Twenty-one witnesses accused Lütken of accepting bribes and, although the Senate supported their colleague, the *Bürgerschaft* suspended him. The unanimity of the Senate was not complete, however, and the Imperial Commissioner charged with re-establishing order quickly perceived that the splits within the Senate had emerged from long-held grudges: Lütken was “roundly despised” by many of his colleagues.⁸² Thus, what first appears as a conflict over principles concerning the administration of justice exposed personal and family dislikes and loyalties and less obvious commercial rivalries; these proved determinant. Such realities complicate the story and remind us that conflicts were never merely two-sided nor did opposing positions remain firm. Mors, for example, was the brother-in-law of three important men in the government: the aldermen Jürgen Schröttingk, Hermann Rentzel, and Peter von Spreckelsen. Peter was Johann's sibling but little brotherly love bonded them; they quite heartily loathed one another. The dissonance turned on family jealousies and ancient altercations. Mors himself had a close tie to at least one member of the Senate, the *Bürgermeister*

⁸¹ Geert Seelig, *Die geschichtliche Entwicklung der Hamburgischen Bürgerschaft und die hamburgischen Notabeln* (Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem, 1900), 57; Rückleben, “Rat und Bürgerschaft,” 143; Heinrich Reincke, *Hamburg, ein kurzer Abriß der Stadtgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Bremen: Friesen, 1925), 119.

⁸² Rückleben, “Rat und Bürgerschaft,” 152.

Nikolaus Jarre, whom his sister had wed. Here, familial ties generated conflict rather than cooperation. A disputed inheritance involving Mors's sister fed the acrimony. Jarre had supposedly also hindered Mors's selection as senator. Certainly, the administration of urban justice was not an insignificant matter. That issue, however, cannot be dissociated from personal feuds in a system where inter-marriage and inter-linked business interests welded political alliances together but also pried them apart. Far too frequently historians have emphasized the amity and ignored the divisions familial closeness and business affairs produced.⁸³

Disputants, too, attributed rancor to individual hatreds, regarded them as such, and fended them off personally. One cannot, of course, ignore the fact that the quarreling parties used smear tactics to deflect the seriousness of a charge. Nonetheless, struggles assumed personal terms and each party selected similar rhetoric in offering battle. Lütken protested in print that "one undoubtedly knows with what tenacity my opponents have pursued me," using, for instance, "the pretext of corruption" to inflame the Bürgerschaft and rise up against the Senate. He characterized Mors as "my greatest enemy" who "fulminated" against him in the Bürgerschaft.⁸⁴

The words "inflamed" and "fulminated" should not be taken lightly or dismissed as mere metaphors. Deliberations often became quite heated in the Bürgerschaft convocations, especially when confronted with specific members of the Council of Aldermen or the Senate it regarded as hostile to its interests or slighting of its prerogatives; words sometimes led to fisticuffs. A large number of documents testify to the violence that could, and often did, break out in meetings, and that resulted from the exchange of insults. The Senate in 1703, for example, pleaded for calm and described chaotic situations. Despite attempts to convene reasonable meetings and promote "peaceful thoughts," the situation repeatedly careened out of control. The report spoke of those "firebrands, who fly in the face of all fear of God, flout Christian brotherly love, civic duty, law, order, and respect" and who confronted "peace-loving citizens with defamatory words." Not content with launching verbal missiles, they reached for "clubs and sticks [taken] from broken-up chairs and benches," grievously wounding some and driving others out of the hall, and "yes, would even have used fatal force" if they had not been restrained. Not satisfied with creating such mayhem, they shot off in the following days a volley of "vile and threatening pasquinades."⁸⁵

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 147–67.

⁸⁴ "Schedula Protestationis ex. resp. Requisitionis et appellatoris Petri Lütken, Consulis Hamburgensis: 1666. 16. Febr.," handwritten, no. 24 in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol. 81, "Hamburgische Streit-Schriften von A°1663 bis A°1664 inclusive." Despite the chronological limits suggested by this title, the omnibus volume contains numerous pamphlets reaching beyond 1664 and at least until 1698.

⁸⁵ "E. E. Rahts Der Stadt Hamburg MANDAT, Vom 15. October Anno 1703," no. 116 in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol. 211.

Of course, these documents do not transparently describe events as they occurred. Accusing one group of causing tumult and promoting chaos became a time-tested manner of downplaying or dismissing their claims by branding them troublemakers and godless annihilators of civic harmony. Those under attack often stood on their understanding of the civic and official duties entrusted to them. In his defense, for example, Spreckelsen indignantly insisted that he had meticulously adhered to the guidelines of his office and that his only offense lay in refusing to deviate from them. He, in turn, accused Mors and his “cabal” of personal insult and injury. In his appeal for justice to the Imperial Courts, Spreckelsen’s son spoke of how Mors had sought to blacken his father’s reputation in the *Bürgerschaft* and even “make [his] life and limb insecure.” Mors had, moreover, “with gestures of his hat and hands encouraged others to riot.”⁸⁶ The Spreckelsen/Mors conflict embodied major political issues. It represented an especially intense skirmish in a much longer war between *Bürgerschaft* and Senate over important issues of justice and civic freedoms (*bürgerliche Freiheiten*). Still, one should not ignore the fact that these broader concepts coalesced around individual issues and events and not the other way around.

It was not only major members of Hamburg’s administrative and governmental apparatus who provoked incidents that roiled political life in the city. In 1719, when Jobst von Overbeck, a merchant and one of the several directors of St. Hiobs Hospital, accused the house-manager, Carstens Evers, of pilfering funds entrusted to him and of mismanaging hospital accounts, he touched off a conflagration and an affair that dragged on for several years. As in so many cases, it picked open barely healed political wounds. They then suppurated. Overbeck had tried to persuade the hospital’s governing board to act, but its members remained obdurate in refusing to do so. He then turned to print. Flipping through the pages of Lochau’s collection makes clear just how immediate such responses were and how pamphlets literally flew off the presses (a haste often reflected in the unevenness of type and frequent smudging of letters). A nineteenth-century commentator used the conflict as an example of the pettiness of pamphlet wars that took on their own life with seemingly little logic and less justification: “One piece called forth the next . . . and this exchange of pasquinades [thus] lasted a full six years. Considering the insignificance of their content [this can] surely count as one of the most tediously wearisome [incidents] in Hamburg’s [history].”⁸⁷

Such brouhahas may have seemed tempests in a demi-tasse to him, but the very fact that the struggle persisted, that the pamphlets continued to appear,

⁸⁶ “An Die Römische Käserl . . . Maytt. Allerunterthänigste Replica. In Sache Peter von Spreckelsen Johannis Sohn Klägern. Contra Lt. Jacob Morrsen Beklagten,” November 1668, no. 120 in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol. 81

⁸⁷ Carl Mönckeberg, “Jobst von Overbeck,” *ZVHG* 4 (1858): 324–5.

that the malignity hardly abated over years, and that yet older incidents reappeared in the interstices of the “Overbeck affair,” testifies to the criticality such individual cases assumed. These confrontations had political legs and inserted themselves into more grandiose political battles. They incorporated values and principles that could be found at many sites in the political and mercantile landscape, whether on the hills of the Senate, the plateau of the *Bürgerschaft*, or the plains of the parish. In the Overbeck case, typically, the original *casus belli* shrank in import: the malfeasance of Evers receded into the background while the negligence, or worse, of Overbeck’s fellow-directors came to the fore. By 1717, his language had lost all restraint: Evers was guilty of “a committed fraud” and Overbeck’s colleagues had, probably for their own gain, he hinted darkly, ignored these or at the very least turned a blind eye. One special object of his ire was his colleague, Jacob Volckmann, who had gone so far as to invent old statutes to justify unacceptable practices. Overbeck pursued his case in print until 1720, although failed to achieve his goal of reform or the dismissal of Evers.⁸⁸

Bontemantel’s observations on the Amsterdam *vroedschap* also, as we have seen, offer rich detail on the dynamics of everyday politicking. Nineteenth-century observers, such as Kernkamp who selected, edited, and commented on Bontemantel’s *Notes*, understood that personalities and “inconsequential” matters were the *primum mobile* of urban politics, but also tended to regard those events as either trivial (despite serious sequelae) or somehow separate from real politics. A somewhat bemused Kernkamp refers to these as “very petty incidents” such as “nasty words spoke in a drunken state, behind-the-back gossip, or common rumor.” He also described Bontemantel as something of a scandalmonger and author of a *chronique scandaleuse* about the Amsterdam political elite; he was not. Bontemantel and his contemporaries did not distinguish sharply between “frivolous scandals” and “politically weighty concerns” and neither should we if we seek to comprehend the tenor of political life.⁸⁹

Such conflicts, in fact, made up the tissue of political life in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. Because so many people were actually involved in one way or another in politics, they also became engaged in debates over propriety in office and how politicking should proceed. Admittedly, Overbeck and Volckmann carried out their dispute at a fairly elevated level, but similar contretemps occurred in different political arenas and among far less well positioned and less influential people but with sometimes surprising vehemence and greater repercussions. One need only consider the case of Johann Aldag.

⁸⁸ Lochau’s collection contains at least nine pamphlets written by Overbeck, all in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vols. 219–21. There are additional pamphlets available in other omnibus volumes, for example, in *ibid.*, no. 9 in A834/51. Volckman’s defense (“Abgenöthigte Ehre-Rettung Wieder die Von dem Hn. Jobst van Overbeck/. . . mir zu Ungebühr angehälsete Beschuldigungen/ Meine Jacob Volckmanns/ p.t. Mit-Vorsteher Des Hospitals zu S. Hiob In Hamburg,” 1718), no. 68 in omnibus vol. 220.

⁸⁹ Bontemantel, 1: xxxi, xxxiii.

In itself insignificant, it engendered a political clash that reverberated through several layers of Hamburg's population.

The story begins, or rather ends, with a funeral and the mutilation of a corpse. On 20 December 1697, the Senate posted a notice requesting information on "a godless outrage." What had happened and to whom? On the previous Wednesday, several "blasphemous folk" seized hold of Aldag's coffin on its way to the churchyard and then proceeded to violate the corpse "even stomping on it and [then] tossing it into the river."⁹⁰ The deceased had been a bookkeeper at the Hamburg Bank and, according to his accusers, from the very moment he took up that position in 1676, had begun to steal money by doctoring the books. Using illicitly obtained funds, he played the market, speculated in negotiable paper for his own account, and hatched schemes for further enriching himself and his fellow members of the government body entrusted with supervising the Bank. Thus, the problem was not simply that of a malfeasant minor official, but of a top-to-bottom corruption in managing civic funds. Aldag was small fry, but his crime gave the Bürgerschaft an opportunity to launch a virulent attack on the Senate for failing to act expediently to halt this "true theft."⁹¹

Pamphleteers adroitly used the Aldag case to pummel the Senate and to defend the Bürgerschaft's position. Two prominent lawyers, Durrefeld and Köhlbrandt, who, according to Lochau, "enjoyed much credit in the Bürgerschaft at that time," quickly seized the opportunity and condemned the Senate's procrastination in pursuing such "enemies of the commonweal" and such "diverters of charitable funds." Simultaneously, they defended the rights of the Bürgerschaft vis-à-vis the Senate. They expressed outrage at "the [continued] corrupt exercise of justice." These pamphlets, moreover, compared the harshness with which the Senate had pursued an earlier "victim," August Wygand (whose case will concern us in [Chapter 3](#)) for theft while ignoring the equally great malfeasance of Aldag. Because, they insisted, Wygand defended the rights of the Bürgerschaft, the Senate hounded him mercilessly and drove him from Hamburg. Aldag, although punished, was allowed to remain in Hamburg and was accorded an honorable funeral. The incident illustrates yet again how contemporaries stitched together different individual cases into a whole-cloth litany of outrage and argument.⁹² The authors offered a vivid

⁹⁰ From no. 55 in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol. 208.

⁹¹ "Species Facti Des Johann Allddags/ Vormahligen Banco-Cassiers, Verbrechen/ Auch was wider Hamburgischen Statuten und Recessen darbey vorgenommen und unterlassen . . .," no. 56 in StAHbg, omnibus vol. 208.

⁹² Lochau's note to "Schreiben Eines Freundes aus Hamburg An einen Fremden in Regensburg Wegen Johann Aldag Und dessen Verbrechen," 1698, no. 56 in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol. 208. On the importance of an honorable funeral, see several articles in Joachim Whaley (eds.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982). On the stigma attached to a dishonorable funeral or burial, Mary Lindemann, "Armen- und Eselbegräbnis in der europäischen Frühneuzeit: Eine Methode

picture of how the Senate had misused its power to help, or hurt, individual citizens.

These and similar charges cannot be taken as a transparent reflection of true practice in the absence of further exculpatory or damning evidence. Nonetheless, to be effective, claims of impropriety had to bear at least some probability, or sensibility, of truth. Thus, while one cannot accept naively that the political chicanery described so colorfully here actually existed, the general outlines of how government worked, or how politicking was accomplished, must represent at least a fairly accurate approximation. It also alerts us to the problem of distinguishing between whether a particular incident *reflected* broader issues or whether it *effected* them. No simple rule of thumb easily separates one from the other. The value of these individual instances is that they accomplished both simultaneously. The first is unsurprising; one would expect that circulating ideas might echo in a wide range of concurrent or subsequent affairs and that such would be taken up later to press other, larger agendas. Influence did not, however, flow in one direction. Rather, individual instances themselves generated awareness of political issues and highlighted political moments; they then became integral parts of politics and politicking.

Antwerp's documentary records lack the plentifulness of information on politics available for Amsterdam and Hamburg. One possible, and plausible, explanation is that much real political life took place in the interstices of the relationship between central government (whether Spanish or Austrian, and from Brussels, Madrid, or Vienna) and the city. Still, politicking in Antwerp seems to have resembled its counterparts in Amsterdam and Hamburg, but also – in certain aspects – diverged from it. In matters concerning finances, the composition of the government in Antwerp, with its four groups, could allow for tensions and opposition to well up between the magistracy and the representatives of the guilds and the citizens. Such enmities only rarely erupted into open warfare *within* the city; initiatives of the central government, however, provoked far more perilous splits. The 1658–9 uproar about the postal system and the issue of sale of offices are cases in point. The former had first arisen within the Broad Council. Discussion there did not always proceed decorously, at least in its exchanges with the central government. The Broad Council and, in particular, the headmen, wardmasters, and guild-deacons, could be quite defiant in their opposition to attempts by the central government to pass new taxes (or collect ones actually already in force) even when the magistracy had previously agreed.

Even within the magistracy, matters of seemingly little consequence repeatedly unsettled urban politics. Here, the peculiar composition of the magistracy (as compared to Amsterdam and Hamburg) with its large percentage of noble magistrates, gave occasion for troubles within these bodies and even outside

sozialer Kontrolle?" in Richard Toellner and Paul R. Blum (eds.), *Studien zur Thematik des Todes im 16. Jahrhundert* (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog August Bibliothek 1983), 125–40.

them. One prickly cause of discontent within the magistracy was precedence. Apparently, until the development of the position of burgomaster in the fifteenth century, no real head of the magistracy existed and no order of rank established a hierarchy among the schepenen. In the sixteenth century, however, status became a vexed issue and, in the 1630s and 1640s, often created discord within the magistracy. The basic dispute turned on how schepenen should be ordered: whether rank was to be based on the nobility or the seniority of an individual. The Antwerp pensionary suggested that position should be determined "according to the date of the oath," that is, by strict seniority. Hardly surprisingly, that idea failed to please the noble schepenen who initiated a legal case in 1649. Thereafter, conflicts over precedence – but actually over weightier matters of office-holding and the distribution of offices – continued at least through the end of the seventeenth century. Wrangling over the assignment of rank occurred and, one suspects, entwined with larger political issues, although cause and effect are by no means self-evident. In 1654, for example, a dispute broke out between François de Bejar and Willem Despommereaux. In that year Bejar had been named a knight and "thus demanded a seat in the college [of schepenen] forthwith." It was another instance of how a personal quarrel touched on, or actually called forth, broader matters of constitutionality. The complaints the emeritus-schepen Philips Rubens raised in 1667 and 1668 further hint at the major issues secreted behind what seem trifling matters. Rubens protested that Jan Armand della Faille had received the post of senior church master "because of precedence." Offices, he insisted, were to be distributed only according to seniority, which he claimed. In 1675, the question arose about his appointment as a schepen for Antwerp's territories outside the walls. He had been a schepen earlier, but then asked for, and received, his dismissal so he could take up the salaried position of secretary. So, from when did his appointment date? The original schepen instance or the second much later one?⁹³

Throughout these years, however, the greatest political moment, and thus the one that sheds the clearest light on how politics worked, came in opposition to measures the central government in Brussels attempted to enforce. Those demands had the immediate knock-on effect of exacerbating, or actually sparking, internal contestations. Often, Antwerp's protests fell together with those of other Brabant cities, such as Brussels and Leuven. Central government attempts to exert greater control drew cries of rage from the cities but also stirred up dissent within them; protests about trampling the city's time-honored privileges could be directed at internal political opponents as well as external authorities. The central government expressed concern about the "too great liberty" and opposition demonstrated by the Broad Council in

⁹³ Lutgard Turnhout, "De Magistraat te Antwerpen, 1650–1674: Een bijdrage tot de institutionele en sociale geschiedenis," (2 vols.; Licentiaat verhandeling, Gent, 1980), 1: 27; *Antwerpiensia* (1948): 133–6.

Antwerp and, from the 1650s through the end of old regime government in the southern Netherlands, this tension manifested itself repeatedly. Brussels had specifically intended the Political Regulation of 1659 to curb the freedom of the Broad Council. The considerable “disruptions in civic life” that had purportedly forced the promulgation of the Regulation involved an action against the five representatives of the guilds who had refused to accept the new postal arrangement and whom the Brabant Council subpoenaed. Groups both within and outside the ruling circle sensed more insidious motives at work, probably correctly. Opponents to the postal concession not only objected that it violated the rights and privileges of the city; it also represented an overt move of the central state against Antwerp. The issue uncovered the splits existing between the various members of the Broad Council; the magistrates and emeritus schepenen on one hand acceding to the request and the deacons refusing.⁹⁴

The 1659 Political Regulation hardly ended the battle over rights and liberties. It recurred several times thereafter, often as direct confrontations with the central government over issues of finances and taxation or in the deliberations over imposts and subsidies that constituted a large percentage of the routine business of the Broad Council in subsequent years.⁹⁵ The *Ordonnatie Caroline* of April 1681 responded to the difficult financial situation existing throughout the country; it eliminated a number of offices, ordered the sale of unnecessary property owned by the city, and introduced other cost-cutting measures. When Antwerp learned of its provisions in June 1681, opposition among the guild-deacons and the aldermen of the Cloth Hall who had thereby lost their jobs, burst forth. It was succeeded by the “neck-benders” (*knikkers*) uproar which involved a quarrel over the collection of a semi-annual special tax to defray central government costs. The government wanted to farm it and the whole matter caused bitter dissension among the guild-deacons. The deacons of the wine publicans and the coopers opposed the tax-farming project and referred to their colleagues who agreed as neck-benders, that is, those who had caved in to pressure. The Broad Council wished to debate the issue and seek a mutually acceptable compromise but the Marquis de Grana (at that time governor) forbade it, seeing the request and the Broad Council itself as equally seditious.⁹⁶

In the early part of the eighteenth century, similar splits in the Antwerp government became apparent with the collection of a tax known as the 20th penny for two successive years, 1714 and 1715. The guilds and deacons in Antwerp apparently agreed to the first but protested the collection of the second. The conflict, which was not unique to Antwerp, continued; opposition had also

⁹⁴ Prims, 6A: 161, 168–9.

⁹⁵ The protocols (*magistraatsboeken*) of the Broad Council reveal the weight of these matters in the normal run of business. The protocols run from 1579 to 1790, FA, PK 1656–1804.

⁹⁶ Prims, 6A: 168–9; Turnhout, “Magistraat,” 9–11; Louis Torfs, “Les émeutes d’Anvers en 1659,” AARAB 2nd ser., part 17 (1871): 474–89.

appeared in Brussels. The tax question produced a battle between the governor and central government on the one hand and the constitutional power of the Broad Council on the other. It finally required the sending of troops to Antwerp to enforce the measure and to arrange for the eventual collection of the second 20th penny, albeit three years later.⁹⁷ This measure only postponed a fight that cropped up again in the 1730s, 1740s, and especially 1750s.

Beginning in 1750, the new governor, the Marquis Botta-Adorno, launched another attempt to reform finances. This effort, too, evoked fierce opposition from the Broad Council and especially from the wardmasters and guild-deacons, who galvanized the opposition with successful delaying actions. Apparently, the provisions of the 1659 Regulation that had limited the activities and power of the Broad Council were being ignored, or so Botta-Adorno charged. He responded in 1752 by promulgating a new regulation that specifically criticized the Broad Council in Antwerp for allowing all sorts of abuses to creep in and for unjustifiably trying to restrict his authority. The new rule comprised fourteen points that closely regulated how and how often the Broad Council was to meet, thus seemingly breaking the power of the wardmasters and guilds once and for all. Nonetheless, tensions continued and when Botta-Adorno's successor in office, Count Cobenzl, asked for a subsidy to cover other government costs, all the provinces and cities agreed except Antwerp; the Broad Council there demanded "that first Botta-Adorno's regulation be suppressed." The issue split the magistracy and, although the exciting moment was financial, the fallout was constitutional.⁹⁸

Conclusion

The early modern merchant republics, or at least the three treated here, governed in strikingly similar and just as strikingly *dissimilar* ways. All three acknowledged the venerable idea that an aristocratic system in which the "best men" conned the ship of state formed the most perfect government. All three had roughly comparable, but by no means identical, governmental structures that instantiated this system. All three regarded themselves as aristocratic-republican polities and acknowledged little or no contradiction in that hyphenated adjective. Of course, each experienced a different political and economic destiny over the course of the long eighteenth century, but each retained its character, to a greater or lesser degree, of a self-governing merchant republic

⁹⁷ Prims, 7: 7–15; Louis Galesloot, "Het Knickerspel: Épisode inédit de l'histoire communale d'Anvers," *AARAB* 2nd ser. part 8 (1872): 373–458.

⁹⁸ Prims, 7: 45–61; Elisabeth Kovács, "Die südlichen Niederlande innerhalb der österreichischen Monarchie des 18. Jahrhunderts," in Roland Mortier and Hervé Hasquin (eds.), *Études sur le XVIIIe siècle*, vol. 15: *Unité et diversité de l'empire des Habsbourg à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1988), 25–37; Richard Pražák, "Die böhmischen Länder, Belgien und die Reformen von Joseph II," in *ibid.*, 65–73.

whose elites were deeply committed to preserving freedom and harmony if sometimes only rhetorically.

Some strong political principles, or even one might say, emotions and attachments, guided political life, but these did not for the most part adhere to, or derive from, well-developed and clearly articulated political philosophies. That does not mean, of course, that no one wrote political commentary, although the vein of it ran more deeply in Amsterdam than in either Antwerp or Hamburg. Most political activity within the city and its ruling councils turned on individual incidents and was driven by attempts to resolve immediate problems. Even one of the most important political theorists of the Dutch Republic, Pieter de la Court, wrote as an engaged participant in an current political situation. Broader concerns and even ideals could, of course, animate or disrupt political life, but quotidian political action never slavishly followed a five-year plan nor did political elites draft agendas on a vision of a future that much differed from the past.⁹⁹ They inevitably couched demands for change in the form of traditional freedoms and liberties or used those terms to defend or justify violent political upheaval.

This chapter has tried to recapture those political worlds. It has for the most part stressed congruence in political culture that drew all three cities together under the umbrella term of merchant republic but it has also devoted considerable space to illuminating their differences. If harmony and cooperation were the rhetorical glue that held the whole together, they were rarely realities and the history of *governing* (rather than a history of government) was riven with contestation. Those contests occasionally reflected deeply held political positions (less clearly, ideas), such as those of the states' party and the prince's party in Amsterdam, but they most frequently emerged from the quotidian striving of groups and individuals to secure their own welfare and prosperity and promote the welfare and prosperity of the city. Welfare and prosperity formed key concepts because politics in the merchant republics was political and economic, as well as social, cultural, and religious. Ambitions – political and economic – frequently clashed, of course, and in no respect was that discord more apparent than in the fraught situations charges of corruption provoked.

⁹⁹ James Allen Vann, *The Making of a State: Württemberg, 1593–1793* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 22.

Discord

Despite quite sincere attempts ruling elites made to harmonize political life internally and to present wherever possible a united front to the rest of the world, everyday political life proved anything but tranquil; indeed, it was frequently discordant and repeatedly unsettled by “troubles.” The concept of “troubles” perfectly reflects contemporary understanding; troubles arose and had to be dealt with and overcome one by one. Solutions might well draw upon larger, often vaguely expressed if none the less deeply held, beliefs and ideas, such as that of Dutch “true freedom” (*ware vryheid*), German liberty (*Teutsche Freiheit*), or Brabant customary rights. Just as many solutions were jury-rigged and patched over, rather than obliterated, differences.¹ While the triggers of discord were many, one grievance formed a persistent trope: corruption. Corruption could disturb civic peace and animate civil violence; it frequently generated, sustained, and exacerbated political in-fighting and civil unrest.

Contemporaries endowed corruption with many meanings. It could refer to the corruption of an entire political system by the overweening power and arrogance of one part such as a ruling oligarchy.² Corruption also indicated the misuse of funds, a malfeasance at many levels that could be viewed as

¹ I have borrowed the idea of “troubles” from Jonathan Scott, *England’s Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). England’s “troubles” were not those of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, but the concept neatly captures how contemporaries regarded the political problems that faced them and, as Scott points out, historical analysis “[needs] to take contemporary beliefs seriously” (4).

² “[D]iscussions over bureaucratic values not only loomed large long before 1750, but could be closely intertwined with constitutional and ideological issues even at an early stage.” Toon Kerkhoff, Ronald Kroeze, and Pieter Wagenaar, “Corruption and the Rise of Modern Politics in Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Comparison between France, the Netherlands, Germany and England,” *JMEH* 11 (2013): 28.

perdurable or sporadic, systemic or unique, debilitating or trifling. An illicit trade in offices and posts, or the monopolization of power by one group of allied individuals or families, could also be judged corrupt. Equally provocative was the mishandling of privilege and especially the abuse of justice. In all these instances, individuals and individual events assumed enormous moment. Charges of corruption could touch off more dangerous political tumults as well as assume central rhetorical roles in the quite violent constitutional conflict that broke out in mid seventeenth-century Hamburg, or the Doelisten and Patriot movements in mid to late eighteenth-century Amsterdam, or in the struggles between Antwerp and a centralizing government (either Spanish or Austrian) in Brussels. Corruption, or charges of corruption, shaped ideas of “freedom” and “republicanism” and formed common elements in the complicated patterns of politicking typical of these three cities. What follows first takes up the quagmirish task of defining what corruption meant and how the word echoed in the political debates of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century merchant republics.

A bedeviled concept

Writing about corruption in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is rather like tracking the snark. Corruption, like that famous inconceivable creature, proves difficult to define and the quest to grasp hold of it perhaps futile.³ The problem persists as the title of an article in the *Süddeutscher Zeitung* in October 2008 on political gifting suggests: “And they don’t [even] know what it means.”⁴ That inconceivability is, however, somewhat curious because corruption lurked everywhere in the political life, the political culture, and the political discourse of the early modern world. Corruption functioned as a motor that drove attempts at reform, convulsed polities, and ruined – or built – political careers. Generations of scholars, writing about the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century world, virtually unanimously regarded corruption as a ubiquitous, if deplorable, political reality. A common thread in the moralistic literature of

³ The Lewis Carroll poem, “The Hunting of the Snark,” describes “with infinite humour the impossible voyage of an improbable crew to find an inconceivable creature.” Sidney Williams, Falconer Madan, Robert L. Green, and Denis Crutch, *The Lewis Carroll Handbook*, ed. Denis Crutch (4th edn., Ingelwood, CA: Dawson Publishing, 1979), 90.

⁴ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 October 2008. Niels Grüne took this as the title of his contribution to a collection of essays on corruption, which is where I first saw it. “‘Und sie wissen nicht, was es ist’: Ansätze und Blickpunkte historischer Korruptionsforschung,” in Niels Grüne and Simona Slanička (eds.), *Korruption: Historische Annäherungen an eine Grundfigur politischer Kommunikation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 11, 112. A recent article argues that “much [work] still needs to be done at the theoretical level to place corruption firmly in its social and intellectual context.” Niels Grüne and Tom Tölle, “Corruption in the *Ancien Régime*: Systems-theoretical Considerations on Normative Plurality,” *JMEH* 11 (2013): 31.

the nineteenth century, as well as twentieth-century treatments of republicanism, blamed corruption for the stagnation and decline of republics especially and of all polities more generally. These perceptions have weighed heavily on our modern views of political corruption. The mid and late nineteenth-century largely discovered or even invented, corruption and endowed it with what have become its easily recognizable qualities.⁵ This observation does not suggest, however, that little or no serious historical work has been done on corruption since the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries; that is far from true. The literature is, in fact, quite voluminous.⁶ Nonetheless, how earlier generations of scholars conceived corruption still occupies a place in early twenty-first-century analyses if perhaps most often as a basis for debate or a position to refute.

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians of virtually every stripe – from nationalist to socialist – united in deploring the dirty politics that, in their minds, characterized the oligarchies ruling early modern city-states. From the 1860s onwards, for example, commentary proliferated on the rampant corruption viewed as typifying the regents in Dutch cities. In journals of a patriotic (*vaderlandsch*) nature, such as the *Netherlandish Yearbook* or the *Netherlandish Spectator*, in genealogical periodicals like *The Navorscher*, but also in regional scholarly publications, such as the *Contributions to the History*

⁵ I am hardly the first to suggest this or to note that the nineteenth century often evaluated and condemned seventeenth- and eighteenth-century practices by its own standards. The study of elites/regents in Dutch cities was greatly stimulated by the appearance in 1961 of Daniel J. Roorda, *Partij en factie: De oproeren van 1672 in de steden van Holland en Zeeland, een krachtmeting tussen partijen en facties* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1961). The “Werkgroep Elites” was founded in the Netherlands in the late 1970s and produced a series of dissertations and later books that re-evaluated the corrupt practices and the socio-political endogamy of the Dutch regents. In his study of the regents in Gouda, for example, Jacob J. De Jong points out that the practice of allowing substitutes to fill positions in government “has earned these governors a bad name in the historiography” especially among “historians from the previous [nineteenth] century.” *Met goed fatsoen: De elite in een Hollandse stad, Gouda 1700–1780* (The Hague: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1985), 37. Rudolf Dekker also dates the modern concept of corruption as having been born in the nineteenth century. “Corruptie en ambtelijke ethiek in historisch perspectief,” in *De Gids: Nieuwe vaderlandsche letteroefeningen* 194 (1984): 117. The historical study of political corruption was recently the subject of a cooperative research project at the University of Bielefeld and the focus of a 2008 conference: “Political Corruption in Historical Perspective,” 20–2 February 2008.

⁶ A full bibliography of what has been produced just in the last decade on the subject would be very lengthy. Recent works, however, competently review the literature as well as consider the validity of the models and interpretations advanced. See Grüne and Slanička, *Korruption*; Ulrich von Alemann (ed.), *Dimensionen politischer Korruption: Beiträge zum Stand der internationalen Forschung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005) and especially Alemann’s own article in that collection: “Politische Korruption: Ein Wegweiser zum Stand der Forschung,” 13–49. See also Jens Ivo Engels, “Korruption,” in Friedrich Jäger (ed.), *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2008), 7: cols. 74–80.

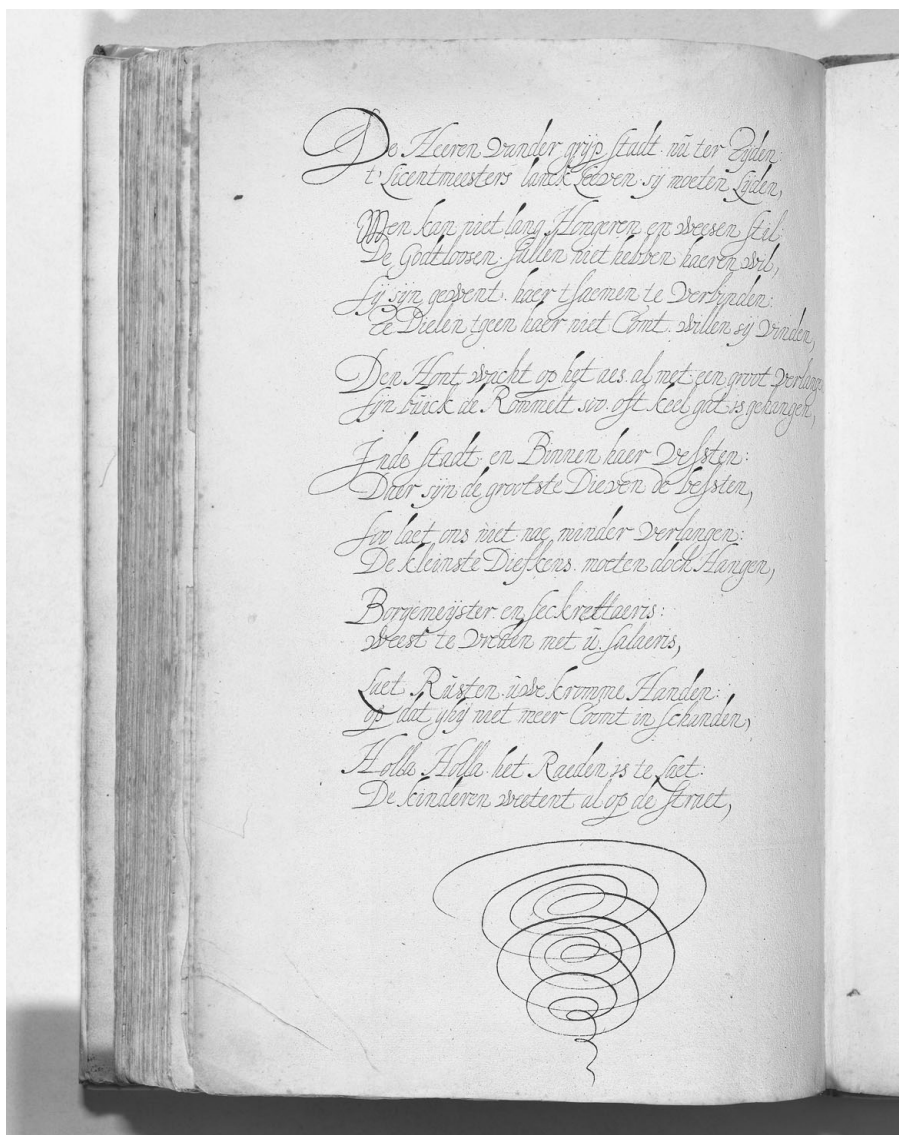


FIGURE 4 Gesina ter Borch (1633–90), poem describing corruption in Amsterdam's city government

of Groningen, numerous authors, including prominent liberal academics like Robert Fruin, unearthed corruption almost everywhere in the annals of the Dutch Republic. The doyen of Flemish history, Pieter Geyl, chimed right in, describing oligarches who pursued “politics completely devoid of any higher

purpose.”⁷ Article followed article revealing – and reviling – unbridled massive corruption and publishing excerpts from manuscript sources to substantiate the virtual omnipresence of nepotism, office-jobbing, “oligarchic abuses,” “government intrigues,” and sheer preference – the corruption – that, for them, disfigured and deformed the Dutch *ancien régime*.⁸

Most attention focused on the contracts of correspondence or “harmonies” (*contracten van correspondentie*) concluded among members of the magistracy. Nineteenth-century historians almost universally regarded these as thinly veiled examples of *kuiperij* (“cooperage,” “corruption” or “machination”). Moreover, these nineteenth-century commentators, like many twentieth-century historians, tended to group together under the umbrella term “corruption” a variety of practices “like bribery, extortion, nepotism, string-pulling, [and] squeeze” while disregarding the fact that in early modern Europe “these practices were legitimate or else their moral status was confused.”⁹

More recent historiography has broached a more differentiated approach and has tended to regard the contracts, for example, as perfect examples of

⁷ *Nederlandsch Jaarboek, Nederlandsche Spectator, De Navorscher, and Bijdragen te Geschiedenis Groningen Werken van het Historisch Genootschap*. A long and very useful list of articles on the subject of corruption and nepotism can be found in Robert Fruin *et al.* (eds.), *Reperatorium der verhandeligen en bijdragen, betreffende de geschiedenis des vaderlands, in mengelingen en tijdschriften tot op 1860 verschenen* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1863); *Supplement* (Leiden: H. K. Steenhof, 1872); *Tweede supplement* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1884); and *Derde supplement* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1893). Fruin was professor of Dutch national history at Leiden University from 1860 to 1894. Pieter Geyl, *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse stam*, 3 vols. (2nd edn.; Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1948–9), 2: 316–17.

⁸ One early twentieth-century scholar concluded: “Corruption was in the eighteenth century a general evil.” Nico J. J. de Voogd, *De doelistenbeweging te Amsterdam in 1748* (Utrecht: H. de Vroede, 1914), 45. Some exemplary titles exploring the topic of corruption include: Jacob de Witte van Citters, “Hoe onze voorvaders aan een ambt kwamen,” *De Nederlandsche Spectator* (30 April 1864): 138–41; Jacob de Witte van Citters, “Een hoofdstuk uit de geschiedenis van het nepotismus,” *ibid.* (17 October 1863): 331–5; A. C. de Graaf, “Verkoop van ambten, 1747,” *De Navorscher* (1869): 545; F. G. Slotbouwer, “Oligarische misbruiken in het Friesche staatsbestuur,” *Nijhoff Bijdragen* (= *Bijdragen voor Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde*) 3rd series, 1 (1882): 67; and “Regeerings-intrigues,” *Algemeen Nederlandsch familieblad: Orgaan van de Vereeniging Het Nederlandsch Familie-Archief* (1883–4), nos. 30, 32. On similar practices within the Reformed church, see Citters, “In de kerk zooals in den staat werd eertijds gekuip,” *De Nederlandsche Spectator* (1864): 242 and Jan Izaak van Doorninck, “Een kerkelijk contract van correspondentie,” *Verslag der handelingen van de . . . vergadering der Vereeniging tot Beoefening van Overijssels Regt en Geschiedenis* (1886): 37. The most extensive work on the contracts of correspondence that also contains extensive excerpts from documents is: Citters, *Contracten van correspondentie en andere bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van het ambtsbejag in de Republiek der Vereenigde Nederlanden* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1873). On the actions of the stadhouder Willem III in this regard, see Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 837.

⁹ Robert Harding, “Corruption and the Moral Boundaries of Patronage,” in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Fitch and Stephen Orgel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 47.

arrangements that facilitated administration, short-circuited conflict, and prevented factionalism, while becoming over time accepted parts of the state apparatus. Julia Adams in her discussion of the Dutch “familial state” defines them as

compacts [that] formalized the distribution of city offices in written succession rules, laying out systems by which all eligible elite families would take turns getting mayoralties, VOC [Dutch East India Company] directorships, and other top corporate privileges. The contracts regulated the membership in and control over corporate bodies, which were the conditions for capital accumulation, political power, and family status. In the short run, the settlements were an inspired solution: they protected specific families’ stakes in an office and guaranteed that all regent families’ office genealogies would continue unbroken.¹⁰

Luuc Kooijmans insists that not only individuals or families profited but rather “society above all.” The “friendship” that thus evolved “served to consolidate ties within the community.” Similarly, newer studies of patronage networks, such as that of Geert Janssens on Willem Frederick of Nassau, argue that clientage practices proliferated everywhere and only those “that worked against ‘calm and harmony’ were [considered] unacceptable.”¹¹

The ability of powerful individuals to exert pull, to pressure others into doing what they wished, to negotiate with their peers to advance some men and exclude others was thus not necessarily viewed as corrupt. All great urban

¹⁰ Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 146. Adams mentions the development of contracts of correspondence in Amsterdam from 1752, Enkhuizen from 1730, Gouda from 1748, Hoorn from the 1720s, and in Leiden from 1702 to 1721 and 1741. The contracts existed before the eighteenth century in unwritten as well as written forms, see above n6 and n7. The 1752 Amsterdam contract was based on an earlier “Concept tot eenicheyt” (*Unity Concept*) drafted in 1676 by Gillis Valckenier. De Voogd, *De doelistenbeweging*, 36–7.

¹¹ Luuc Kooijmans, *Onder regenten: De elite in een Hollandse stad, Hoorn, 1700–1780* (Amsterdam: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1985), 14. For excellent discussions of how contracts worked out in practice, and in particular instances, see Maarten Prak, *Gezeten burgers: De elite in een Hollandse stad Leiden 1700–1780* (The Hague: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1985), 58–106 and Hendrik van Dijk and Daniel J. Roorda, *Het patriciaat in Zierikzee tijdens de Republiek* (Middelburg: Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, 1980), 95–109. On clientage/patronage and its corruption, see Geert H. Janssen, *Princely Power in the Dutch Republic: Patronage and William Frederick of Nassau (1613–1664)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 174 (quote); Harding, “Corruption,” 47–64; Sharon Kettering, “Gift-giving and Patronage in Early Modern France,” *French History* 2 (1988): 131–51; and specifically on the Dutch situation, Irma Thoen, *Strategic Affection? Gift Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Holland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), which, however, does not primarily focus on political gifting.

In the Dutch context, the work of Daniel J. Roorda and the “Werkgroep Elites” at Leiden, argued that the reason modern observers saw corruption and greed for office virtually everywhere in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was because they applied, inappropriately, a modern definition. Roorda, *Partij en factie*; Henk van Dijk and Daniel J. Roorda, “Sociale mobiliteit onder regenten van de Republiek,” *TVG* 84 (1971): 306–28.

republics worked on just these principles. "Familial" is in many ways a very apt characterization; family members often benefited the most. We have seen how Joachim van Rendorp, a five-time burgomaster of Amsterdam, explicitly acknowledged the ways in which friends, family, and well-wishers had eased his way into powerful, and lucrative, positions; he represented a by-no-means isolated example.¹²

While it would be foolish to deny the criticality of familial ties and bonds of friendship, one should not simplify these relationships or ignore the fact that they often crossed with other forces. Of course, the terms "family" and "familial" never connoted a simple biological fact or not one alone. Rather, they referred to methods and styles of interacting and strategizing in political but also economic and social matters. Family ties bonded, favored, and protected, but also constricted, exposed, and frustrated. Not all family members allowed themselves to be guided meekly by those older or more prominent. Such situations are hard to judge historically, although considerable diary and other personal evidence (such as "ego-documents") particularize how often family members chafed under the demands of relatives or resisted the pressures and expectations placed on them. Family members differed enormously in drive and capability as well as desire and ambition. Likewise, all families experienced demographic vicissitudes: early deaths, unsuitable marriages, weak fertility, and incapacitating physical or mental illnesses thinned out the ranks.¹³ In addition, lines of patronage and clientage often tangled and created delicate or fraught situations for all involved. It was frequently far from a simple matter to judge where one's (or one's family's) true interests lay or how to best exploit an opportunity that might promise advantages on one side but pose equally great disadvantages on the other. Some men and women proved especially sure-footed in traversing this difficult ground, strewn as it was with emotional, intellectual, economic, and political caltrops. Conflicts proved as common as cooperation and troubled virtually every political figure. Thus, concerns of family or friendship rarely rendered a decision obvious or inevitable. Individual circumstances revealed fissures and fault lines, ones that appeared as well in charges of corruption, especially in cities where family and community, public and private, indissolubly mixed.

While the familial governing system typical in the voting (*stemhebbende*) cities of the Dutch Republic has, over the years, attracted the most scholarly

¹² George Willem Vreede, "Familie-regeringen in de republiek der Vereenigde Nederlanden," *Geschieds- en letterkundige herinneringen* (Gorinchem: W. van der Wal, 1836), 2: 30.

¹³ Good illustrations of the difficulties families generated, as well as the material and emotional support they provided, can be found in, for example: Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, vol. 2: *The Tender Passion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Anne-Charlott Trepp, *Sanfte Männlichkeit und selbständige Weiblichkeit: Frauen und Männer in Hamburger Bürgertum zwischen 1740 und 1840* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996). A die-off among regenten families may have short-circuited the creation of a full-blown aristocratic patriciate in Amsterdam. See van Dijk and Roorda, "Sociale mobiliteit."

attention on corruption, other cities in northern Europe, including Antwerp and Hamburg, have received similar treatments. Their late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians, too, produced harsh criticisms of corruption that paralleled those existing in greater abundance for the Dutch cities. The mid nineteenth-century chronicler, Johann Gustav Gallois, for instance, spoke of the “scant morality” in Hamburg’s ruling circles. The socialist historian, Heinrich Laufenberg, writing in 1911, regarded Hamburg’s entire administrative framework as dominated by “blatant corruption” whose “greatest cancer was nepotism.” He identified a series of “evil affairs in the municipal administration” arising from, but also advancing and benefiting, the political dominance of the merchant groups that he titled “plutocratic.” Antwerp’s political history, too, knew similar corruptions, especially apparent in the assessment of taxes and construction of fortifications.¹⁴

Determining what corruption really meant in early modern Europe, however, remains a thorny task. Sharon Kettering’s observation that “the term [political corruption] is difficult to define for the premodern period because it is essentially a modern concept” goes some way to pinpointing the problem as does Rudolf Dekker’s remark that corruption is a “culturally-bonded phenomenon.” Accordingly, many scholars have suggested that no ideal type existed until the nineteenth century conceived one, although the revolutionary movements of the late eighteenth century had already begun to use corruption as an effective weapon against old regime governments.¹⁵

Other scholars, however, maintain that some sense of a public or official morality had developed in the early modern world. Linda Levy Peck, in her work on Stuart England, concludes that an awareness of corruption, and a sometimes vigorous prosecution of it, did exist. As venality in government grew from the end of the sixteenth century, it “prompt[ed] increasingly strident calls for the return to traditional practices and the enforcement of more stringent rules of behavior among ‘the great’.” Others have discussed the serious problems with accepting an “innocence” theory. In an examination of the topic for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Florence, Jean-Claude Waquet refers to the “hackneyed idea that the *ancien régime* was an innocent society in which happy officials were engaged in corrupt acts which were not actually

¹⁴ Johann Gustav Gallois, *Geschichte der Stadt Hamburg* (Hamburg: Ackermann & Wulff, 1866), 155–6; Heinrich Laufenberg, *Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in Hamburg, Altona und Umgebung* (2 vols.; Hamburg: Auer, 1911–31), 1:57; Heinrich Laufenberg, *Hamburg und sein Proletariat im achtzehnten Jahrhundert: Eine wirtschaftliche Vorstudie zur Geschichte der modernen Arbeiterbewegung im niederelbischen Städtegebiet* (Hamburg: Erdmann Drubber, 1910), 25, 30; Hugo Soly, “Grondspectulatie en kapitalisme te Antwerpen in de 16de eeuw,” *EST* 27 (1973): 291–302; Leo van Buyten, “Bureaucratie en bureaucratisering in de lokale besturen der Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 16e tot 18e eeuw,” *TVG* 90 (1977): 523.

¹⁵ Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 192; Dekker, “Corruptie,” 116. Van Dijk and Roorda, in their “Sociale mobiliteit,” made the same point earlier.

corrupt because no law considered them as criminal.” Furthermore, he added, “moral rules concerning integrity had been established very early on.”¹⁶

Although consensus on the term and its manifestations by no means exists, much recent research on corruption has converged on several cogent points. First, corruption is neither inherently nor solely a modern construct, despite the strong impact the nineteenth century had on crafting a powerful and persistent definition of it. Second, while most scholars accept the premise that corruption is socially and culturally set, virtually no one believes any more that the term corruption can be applied usefully to common “early modern types of relationships,” such as, for example, patronage and clientage networks.¹⁷ Third, the discourse of corruption assumed a major role in conflicts between elites and molded how they represented themselves and others. Thus corruption cannot be dismissed as an epiphenomenon or as “simply a tool of ‘outs’ versus ‘ins’.”¹⁸ Fourth, corrupt government did not necessarily mean bad government. “Corrupt” practices could often facilitate economic growth, maintain political stability, or expedite social mobility.¹⁹ Fifth, early modern corruption remained largely the corruption of individuals. Exactly when the historical “references” in the discourse of corruption veered away from “the individual to the systemic” remains unclear. Many scholars locate that sea-change in the middle of the eighteenth century, at the turn of the nineteenth, or even later.²⁰ It is not clear, however, when, or even if, the primacy of individualized corruption actually modified substantially. One can think of many contemporary examples! Finally, critically, and yet hardly surprisingly, the historical study of corruption crosses at many points with that of early modern republicanism.

¹⁶ Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (London: Routledge, 1993), 211; Jean-Claude Waquet, *Corruption: Ethics and Power in Florence, 1600–1700*, trans. by Linda McCall (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984), 12; and similarly, Kettering, *Patrons*, 193.

¹⁷ Grüne, “Ansätze,” 23, 26.

¹⁸ Niels Grüne demonstrates this on the specific example of early modern Cologne in “Anfechtung und Legitimation: Beobachtungen zum Vergleich politischer Korruptionsdefinition in der Frühen Neuzeit,” in *Korruption*, 418–21; Peck, *Court Patronage*, 5.

¹⁹ See, for example, Douglas A. Houston, “Can Corruption Ever Improve an Economy?” *The Cato Journal* 27 (2007): 325–42; Adams, *Familial State*; and the Forum on “The Hidden History of Crime, Corruption, and States,” special issue of *JSH* 45, 3 (Spring 2012).

²⁰ This period falls into what Germans call the *Sattelzeit*, although the exact chronological limits vary, from 1750–1850 or even up to 1870. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979), 1: xv. A recent comparative article on corruption maintains that “a shift in the perceptions of corruption occurred somewhere during the ‘long nineteenth century’ as a result of modernisation processes.” Kerkhoff, Kroeze, and Wagenaar, “Corruption,” 21. But another article in the same collection notes that “the picture emerging from the case material does not support the idea of a caesura during the late *ancien régime*. In the early nineteenth century, the focus of corruption charges still oscillated between rank and role, between elite degeneration and formal irregularities, much as they had done two centuries before.” Grüne and Tölle, “Corruption in the *Ancien Régime*,” 50.

The line dividing acceptable from unacceptable behaviors shifted, often with perplexing rapidity. If these displacements bewilder historians, they also often caught contemporaries out. Natalie Zemon Davis nicely depicts the quandary: "Gifts were everywhere in the movement of French politics, justice, and appointment . . . and they raised important questions about how to tell a good gift from a bad one and about the nature of political reciprocity." "Where did bribery begin?" had no simple answer, especially when casks of wine, braces of game, or silver cups constituted quite legitimate forms of compensation or commendation.²¹

The intermingling of the private and the public realms in early modern times has plagued attempts to create a working, or even heuristically valuable, definition of corruption. The private/public division is itself somewhat anachronistic.²² Modern definitions postulating that corruption involves the improper intrusion of the private into the public falter before the virtually universal overlap of public and private in early modern government and society. Nonetheless, we also cannot deny that a sense of corruption existed even within a world where giving and receiving favors were everyday accepted practices.²³

²¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 85, 88. Florike Egmond has explored corruption in the legal system of the early modern Netherlands on the basis of individual cases in "Recht en krom: Corruptie, ongelijkheid en rechtsbescherming in de vroegmoderne Nederlanden," *BMGN-LCHR* 116 (2001): 1–33. In Antwerp, for example, the schepenen often received "for services rendered to the city" a gift of wine or silver plate. Gerda Broeck, "De Antwerpse Magistraat, 1675–1699: Een bijdrage tot de institutionele en sociale geschiedenis" (Licentiaat, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1980), 1: 318.

²² "The incompatibility of combining a public office with a private business was an anachronism before the modern period," Buyten, "Bureaucratie," 523. The literature on these subjects is vast. See, for instance, Kettering, *Patrons*; Janssen, *Princely Power*; Jeremy Boissevain, *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators, and Coalitions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt and Luis Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Harding, "Corruption"; Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Antoni Maćzak (ed.), with the assistance of Elisabeth Müller-Luckner, *Klientelsysteme im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1988); and, most recently a special issue of *JMEH* 11 (2013) on "Corruption and the Rise of Modern Politics." Heiko Droste, "Patronage in der frühen Neuzeit: Institutionen und Kulturform," *ZHF* 30 (2003): 555–90 reviews much of the literature on patronage produced in the 1980s and 1990s, and suggests the need for renewed investigations of patronage from a cultural historical perspective. He notes: "In early modern times patronage was a broadly accepted medium for [achieving] social mobility, in which self-interest did not have to be concealed. Rather it could be formulated as a legitimate presentation of social change. This occurred in a language, or rhetoric, foreign to present-day readers." *Ibid.*, 589. See also Grüne, "Und sie wissen nicht, was es ist" for another review of recent historiography.

²³ Several scholars working on cities in the Netherlands have argued convincingly that urban oligarchic governments remained quite efficient until about the 1780s. See Prak, *Gezeten burgers*;

Few early modern people regarded the use of public office to foster family or lineage goals as inherently and inevitably corrupt or, for that matter, wrong.

Moreover, one does not have to hunt long to locate the positive valuations family-based governments retained even in a nineteenth-century world ready to excoriate the corruption of *ancien régime* politics. During the 1848 upheavals, members of the old ruling elite in Hamburg bowed to the call for constitutional reform, yet they continued to value the intimate coordination of private and public, family and communal interests. While admitting the necessity of some alterations, the agéd Bürgermeister, Johann Heinrich Bartels, praised “the familial system, upon which our constitution rests and under which the state has prospered.” It must, he insisted, “be carefully preserved.”²⁴ His point of view may have been falling out of fashion then, but fifty, a hundred, or a hundred and fifty years earlier, few would have disputed the legitimacy and morality of a government based on family ties. Admittedly, worries always abounded about the too great influence of one or another family or group of relations because such conjured into being that great bugbear of early modern political life: faction.

The political historian of early modern Europe must thus negotiate a difficult terrain, one littered with obstacles thrown up by the perceptions of an intervening past and pitted with the entrenchments laid down by twentieth-century sociologists and political scientists. If it is naive to accept that corruption never actually existed in the early modern world and that practices later defined as corrupt were simply the products of “other times, other customs,” it is for that very reason essential that those differences be probed.²⁵ While no single historical approach can solve this complex of problems, a meticulous attention to the interaction of governing structures, particular circumstances, and individual personalities offers a way to determine when and why contemporaries deployed charges of corruption and where they found the discourse of corruption expedient.

Political corruption nested in each city’s unique political structure and can only be understood within those contexts. In addition, a sense of corruption virtually always centered on perceptions of individual malfeasance. While, of course, charges leveled against individuals often concealed broader objectives,

Kooijmans, *Onder regenten*; and De Jong, *Met goed fatsoen*. Similarly, venality was not corruption when it was the system, see William Doyle, *Venality: The Sale of Office in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

²⁴ Johann Heinrich Bartels, *Sendschreiben an meine vielgeliebten Mitbürger von J.H. Bartels, Dr., als Privatmann, und mit Stolz setzt er hinzu: als Bürger Hamburgs* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1849), 8–9. On his political position, Gisela Rückleben, “Rat und Bürgerschaft in Hamburg 1595–1686: Innere Bindungen und Gegensätze” (dissertation, Marburg/Lahn, 1969), 20–1.

²⁵ Dekker refers to corruption as a “culturally dependent phenomenon” that, therefore, “not only differed from place to place but also time to time.” “Corruptie,” 116.

concrete instances and peculiar moments remain the most effective points of historical intervention.²⁶ Corruption was, therefore, situational and the variables determining whether contemporaries judged an action corrupt were numerous and included family connections, rank, abilities of the individual, success or failure, shifting political situations and alliances, to enumerate the most obvious. In short, corruption lurked in multiple possibilities and, moreover, as a recent study of a late seventeenth-century case in Gorinchem (Holland) notes, “in order to locate, interpret and define improper conduct, corruption or (in)capability, we may need to look at multiple sources of values . . . [because] it is the conflict between these sources of values and the clash over established but often implicit boundaries that constituted corruption.”²⁷

It proves quite easy to identify points where the discourse of corruption centered a wide range of political developments. The real task is to peel back the rhetoric to determine what was really at stake. Of course, perhaps only a historical ingénue would dare dissociate the two. Cultural studies and post-modernism have sufficiently sensitized scholars to an awareness that the distance between fact and fiction, or between “rhetoric” and “reality,” vanishes when probed. Nonetheless, people meant something when they said “corruption” or when they accused someone of “corrupt behavior.” Contextualizing individual incidents and comparing them with how later generations perceived them, however, imparts greater solidity and substance to a will-o’-the-wisp concept that tends to disappear the closer you approach it.

Early modern corruption clustered around three principal issues: propriety in public finances, justice, and honesty. All were highly colored by the identity of these cities as merchant republics because the term referred to anything which could corrupt the bases of a republican system. All early modern republics accepted tacitly (and sometimes explicitly) the motto that, in republics, “morals must be purer than in monarchies.” Republican and mercantile identities often turned on similar characteristics, both virtues and vices (as [Chapter 4](#) analyzes). This sense of dual identity also conditioned perceptions of corruption. While it would be silly to assert that catchwords are realities,

²⁶ Gisela Rückleben observes that “there was no need at all for [well-defined] theoretical oppositions . . . rather quotidian events were quite enough to generate mistrust and tension and to poison the atmosphere between magistrates and citizens.” “Rat und Bürgerschaft,” 59. Elias stresses the major role played by “personal feuds and animosities.” Elias-2, 46. Even a superficial reading of the pamphlets generated in the political strife of the late seventeenth century in Hamburg reveals the importance of personal incidents and antagonisms. See the “Lochau Collection,” in StAHBg, Bibliothek, “Acta Hamburgensia,” omnibus volumes 201–211. The handwritten commentary on the pamphlets penned by Senator Lochau underscores this fact.

²⁷ M. P. Hoenderboom and Anton D. N. Kerkhoff, “Corruption and Capability in the Dutch Republic: The Case of Lodewijk Huygens (1676),” *Public Voices* 10, 2 [Special Issue on “The Genesis of Public Value Systems: A Symposium”](2008): 21; Pieter Wagenaar, “Classical Corruption: Hugo van Arckel, Dike Warden of the Krimpernerwaard and the Corruption of His Time,” *ibid.*, 44–7.

nonetheless they discursively circumscribed political debate and drove political actions.

Defenses of republicanism evoked the images of probity and responsibility, attacked the corrupt practices that undermined the foundations of the state, and verbally pilloried the vices of preference and favoritism explicitly ascribed to monarchical systems. The specific meanings that filled republican vessels, however, often differed, sometimes dramatically. Regents in Dutch cities understood republican virtues differently from how their critics viewed them; magistrates in Antwerp clashed with wardmasters over the concept of Brabant liberties; and the Senate and Bürgerschaft in Hamburg quarreled over who better guarded republican values. These conflicts raged on big political stages and involved massive clashes, major upheavals, and the destruction of prominent political figures. But they also caught up minnows as well as whales. In those smaller confrontations and tumults, over the appointment, for example, of a director of public works, or the assignment of a position on one of the East India Company's ships, or the granting of an office of inspector, the striving continued, structuring political life in real and immediate ways. The steps connecting the lesser to the greater of these were often very few and conflicts slid up and down with sometimes dizzying speed. The fight of the "little guy" frequently turned into a major confrontation of greater political moment. Large-scale corruption is the best known and the most frequent subject of historical investigations. The ties between big and little corruptions, however, proved equally critical and an examination of both dimensions reveals a great deal about the workings of daily politics in each merchant republic and the values of its governors and citizens.

Antwerp: troubles and the defense of Brabant liberties

The events of the Revolt of the Netherlands in Antwerp – the Spanish Fury of 1576, the siege, and the "fall" of the city in 1585 that ended the short-lived Calvinist republic – have endowed Antwerp with a reputation as "a restless city." That notoriety is, however, only partly deserved and much recent historiography has taken a more sober view, arguing that, in the long run, the conflictual temperature in Antwerp, when compared to other cities, rarely rose to more than slightly fevered. Anything resembling "massive protest" or a "popular uprising" remained in the towns of Brabant a "less manifest phenomenon," at least until the Brabant Revolution of 1789–90. This relatively irenic picture is "at variance with the findings with respect to French, English, German and Dutch towns."²⁸ The truth lies in the middle. Discord also wracked

²⁸ Marnix Beyen, Luc Duerloo, Herman van Goethem, and Carolien van Loon, "Het Calimero-complex van de stad: Een politieke cultuur van klagen en vernieuwen," in Inge Bertels, Bert de Munck, and Herman van Hoethem (eds.), *Antwerpen: Biografie van een stad* (Antwerp: Meulenhoff and Manteau, 2010), 68–74. Karin van Honacker argues that political grievances

Antwerp. Especially troubling loomed issues about the relationship of the city to the government in Brussels and about the proper allocation of political powers within the city. The two meshed. Antwerp experienced many of the same corruptions as did Amsterdam and Hamburg, but charges were also often directed against the rulers of the southern Netherlands as they sought to exert firmer control over the cities of Brabant. This initiative, too, was branded corrupt because it undermined the established political order and weakened the customary rights of an urban republic.²⁹

Corruption thus took several forms and conflict expressed itself in several ways. In the mid sixteenth century, what many perceived as the stranglehold of wealthy merchants over government in the city led to a series of charges of corruption – “de schandalitis” – targeting the malfeasant conduct of magistrates. Increased taxation to support the war as well as the introduction of an excise on beer provoked an uprising in 1554. Speculation in land had earlier stirred up smoldering fires.³⁰ In 1542, Charles V mandated the elevation of new fortifications around Antwerp. Financing for the construction provoked considerable unrest among those whose property assessments shot up. The moment also sparked a spectacular scandal in land speculation that involved the emeritus-burgomaster, Michiel van der Heyden, who exerted virtually complete control over building funds. He hardly stood alone in the business of misdirecting

and tumults were far fewer in Antwerp than in either Brussels or Leuven/Louvain. Yet in financial affairs, Antwerp was far more active than either of the other two cities. I find the division into “political” and “financial” problematic, but nonetheless, her findings also indicate that Antwerp was *relatively* quiet in terms of major political protests. *Lokal verzet en oproer in de 17de en 18de eeuw: Collectieve acties tegen het centraal gezag in Brussel, Antwerpen en Leuven* (Heule: UGA, 1994), 141, 621–4, 653 (quote).

²⁹ Guido Marnef has observed that even in the sixteenth century “[a]lthough the Antwerpers retained a great deal of influence in choosing the *wethouders*, and the old elite was able to maintain itself, the city also had to cope with the growing efforts by the Habsburgs to centralize power.” *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550–1577* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 20; Jan van Roey, *Antwerp: Het avontuurlijk bestaan van een stad* (Antwerp: C. de Vries-Brouwers, 1995), 125–6. In Antwerp, the edicts of Joseph II provoked considerable opposition that was clearly reflected in the gazette and chronicle literature. See, for instance, “Dagboek van Antwerpen naar een handschrift ‘Notitie van alle de Gedenkwaardigste Geschiedenissen voorgevallen in onze stad Antwerpen en elders beginnende van het jaer 1772 tot heeden (20 Januari 1846) door Frans-Joseph De Coninck lesgever (in de Wiskunde), overgeschreven en opgehelderd met aantekeningen en byvoegsels uit verschillende schryvers door Frans van Boghout.” This included extensive excerpts from the *Gazette van Antwerpen*, but also reported the almost entirely negative contemporary commentary on Joseph’s reforms. In September 1784, for example, we read that Joseph’s new edict on marriage was “very contrary to many tenets of our religion laid down by the Council of Trent” (93). See also Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Civic Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

³⁰ Bert Timmermans, *Patronen van patronage in het zeventiende-eeuwse Antwerpen: Een elite als actor binnen een kunstwereld* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008), 32; Soly, “Grondspeculatie,” 291–302.

money; a whole range of others booked “scandalous profits.” In addition, van der Heyden drafted city employees to construct his “pleasure villa” with materials supposedly purchased for the new walls, ramparts, and earthworks. He, and other emeritus-burgomasters, loaned out civic money at usurious rates and falsified accounts. One, Lancelot van Ussel, had extracted about *f*14,000 from the till and slipped it into his own pocket. In the five-year period 1542–7, the two men siphoned off more than *f*57,500.

By the time their knavery was exposed, van der Heyden had died, but the Council of Brabant held his heirs responsible and ordered them and van Ussel to make restitution; without effect. Van Ussel’s political career suffered minor if any damage; over the following years, he became burgomaster and schepen. The real opprobrium fell on the conveniently dead van der Heyden. The court wished to avoid making waves with van Ussel or provoking greater discontent within a populace already seething over increased taxes. To what extent these financial intrigues affected or accelerated the Revolt is difficult to estimate, although some historians have argued that they were not inconsequential.³¹

During the Revolt itself, grievances in Antwerp turned again on finances; protests centered on the limited oversight citizens exercised over communal assets. A small group of magistrates controlled the financial branch entirely and that situation opened room for them to mix private and public money. That situation vexed the city’s administration throughout the sixteenth century. As was often true, one case – that of Christoffel Pruynen – generated considerable strife. Pruynen had become Receiver-General in 1558 and then, in 1561, Treasurer. By 1570, things had begun to stink. Pruynen had slurped money from the treasury – a sum of more than *f*100,000 – and invested it on his own account. Once alerted, the magistracy tried to minimize the damage by placing him under house arrest, but he escaped and fled to Germany. The city seized his goods but no real restitution occurred and the case dragged on until 1615.³²

These two incidents fall outside the chronological scope of this study; nonetheless, they nicely illustrate the corruption that formed part of normal political life in Antwerp. The reasons for discord often emanated from outside the city and these instances offer excellent early examples of how Antwerp’s position in a larger political entity could form, or deform, internal relationships. Unsurprisingly, most protests involved the “defense of political prerogatives” various groups held.³³

Before the quite vigorous protests against the reforms initiated by Joseph II in the 1780s and the revolutionary upheavals of 1789–90, the last real confrontation between the populace and its government occurred in 1659 when renewed complaints about war taxes and excises sent artisans tumbling out onto the

³¹ Hugo Soly, “Fortificaties, belastingen en corruptie te Antwerpen in het midden der 16de eeuw,” *BTG* 53 (1970): 206–10.

³² *Prims*, 6: 353–4. ³³ Honacker, *Lokaal verzet*, 142–3, 621–4.

streets. Other, smaller instances recurred regularly. For instance, in 1655, considerable discontent arose among the wardmasters about the introduction of new fees. Simultaneously, the city and the central authorities (Spanish at this point) clashed over urban autonomy; that confrontation continued and intensified in the eighteenth century under the Austrian Habsburgs.³⁴ At issue lay the status of the city's postal service set up in 1657. In September 1658, the Council of Brabant decided to transfer the city's postal rights with Holland to the house of Thurn und Taxis.³⁵ The magistracy in Antwerp accepted this change reluctantly, but the guild-deacons protested vigorously that such a move seriously undercut the city's traditional privileges. The Council of Brabant proceeded against the leaders of those who opposed the new arrangement. Rioters then plundered burgomaster van Halmale's house and attacked the Receiver-General, Jacques Schenaerts. The situation escalated to the point that some 2000 inhabitants fled the city by the end of October and the upheaval was only suppressed by sending troops to quell it. The troubles, however, gave the central administration a perfect opportunity to step in and "limit the independence of the city through the promulgation of a royal '*regelement polityck*'." This Political Regulation of 1659, as we have seen, bore important consequences for how political business would be done in Antwerp in the future by circumventing the quite representative Broad Council and assigning a good deal of its power to the smaller Monday Council. In a letter that reached the magistrates on 21 October 1659, the governor demanded that the "grand conseil," that is the Broad Council, be forbidden to assemble unless called by the magistracy and was equally forbidden to discuss any subjects that were not on the agenda.³⁶

Act two of this drama stretched over more than a decade, from the late 1660s through the 1680s. New, higher imposts were one exciting cause, but continued protests against the corruption of the city's traditional liberties heightened the political stakes. Once again the guild-deacons and the wardmasters articulated the city's grievances by refusing their agreement to the usual taxes; the battle continued, or rather reignited, over a period of years, blazing up fiercely in 1679, 1680, 1681. The question of "l'impôt" soon became "éternelle." The central government castigated the two disobedient groups as "absolute

³⁴ Bertels *et al.*, *Antwerpen*, 70–1.

³⁵ Wolfgang Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis: Die Geschichte ihrer Post und ihrer Unternehmen* (Munich: Piper, 1990), 106–7. Behringer's massive work on the early modern communication revolution testifies to the importance of Antwerp, but also Amsterdam and Hamburg, as well as other merchant cities, such as Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Cologne, as postal and information centers. Wolfgang Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur: Reichspost und Kommunikationsrevolution in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

³⁶ Prims, 6A: 158–61, 8: 257–8. Timmermans, *Patronen*, 79; Honacker, *Lokaal verzet*, 143; Louis Torfs, "Les Émeutes d'Anvers en 1659: Analyse des actes de réconciliation," *AARAB* 2nd ser. 27 (1871): 483.

criminals.”³⁷ In November 1680, the governor (the Prince of Parma at the time) ordered the arrest of one principal agitator, the emeritus-guild-deacon, Thomas Formestreau, accusing him of “lèse-majesté.” Although he was confined for only two months, the incident further poisoned the atmosphere between the central government and Antwerp’s citizenry; many Antwerpeners considered it a provocation if not actually an open attack on their rights and a corruption of the urban privileges vital to their understanding of a republican system.³⁸

In May 1683, protest again peaked in the uproar about those members of the magistracy and those guild-deacons who apparently “knicked” or bent their necks by agreeing to rate hikes mandated in Brussels.³⁹ Discontent festered throughout the 1680s and, for that matter, well into the eighteenth century. A letter of the then-governor, Cobenzl, referred to “the criminal conduct of the wardmasters and the deacons and perhaps even some part of the magistracy.” In a tone hardly calculated to conciliate, he sneered at those “contemptible Antwerpeners” and reviled Antwerp as “that intractable city.” In doing so, he caught the gist of a conflict that reflected the concatenation of continued enmity between the city and the central government and tensions within the government of Antwerp itself.⁴⁰ The seriousness of the financial situation was not chimerical and, in 1681, steps were again taken to remedy the problem. The Caroline Ordinance from that year raised the prices of offices to be purchased and also specifically reminded the sheriff and his assistant of their duties to keep an eye out “for any abuses, excesses, or frauds, concerning public money.”⁴¹

The transformation wrought by the Treaty of Utrecht that transferred the Spanish Netherlands (and thus Antwerp) to the Austrian Habsburgs assumed great political relevance for the city. Although the centralization attempts of the Austrian Habsburgs were never especially vigorous, they met with stiff opposition from the city and, as before, threaded into, and often exacerbated, internal urban political tussles. The question had long been debated in Antwerp about the composition of the government: was it made up of three or four members? In short, were the emeritus-schepens to be viewed as a separate and distinct college with a vote or just as possessing an advisory function? The dispute continued well into the eighteenth century. The latter interpretation obviously worked to the advantage of the citizenry and the guilds who would thereby push the magistrates into a minority position.⁴²

³⁷ Louis Galesloot, “Het knickerspel: Épisode inédit de l’histoire communale d’anvers,” *AARAB* 2nd ser. 28 (1872): 385.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 393–5. ³⁹ Prims, 6A: 167; Galesloot, “Knickerspel,” 395–406.

⁴⁰ Galesloot, “Knickerspel,” 458.

⁴¹ §§ IX, LXX–LXIX of “De Ordonnantie Caroline” reprinted in Gerda van de Broeck, “De Antwerpse Magistraat 1675–1699,” 2: Appendices.

⁴² Lutgard Turnhout, “De magistraat te Antwerpen, 1650–1674: Een bijdrage tot de institutionele en sociale geschiedenis” (Licentiaat, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1980), 1: 37.

With the changes wrought by the Political Regulation of 1659 and subsequent assaults on its rights and privileges, the city forfeited a degree of its independence although, as Cobenzl's comment suggests, its defeat was by no means total. Still, an older historical tradition, here represented by the archivist and historian Floris Prims, writing in the early twentieth century, regarded the metamorphosis as a momentous sea-change. "From a 'democracy' and a 'republic' that enjoyed its liberties and privileges and that controlled its own system of justice, the city became a mere 'administrative unit'."⁴³

Conflict with an increasingly intrusive central government administration characterized much of the discord that Antwerp experienced in the long eighteenth century. Major corruption scandals, of the type that provoked serious repercussions in Amsterdam and Hamburg, rarely shook the civic peace in Antwerp after the late sixteenth century. More modest cases, however, continued to raise questions about official improprieties or even criminality. Such blow-ups revealed persistent concerns over fiscal irresponsibility and abuse of office; as they simmered, their steam drove quotidian political life. They left behind long memories of injustices unresolved and continued to shape politics even when the immediate exciting cause had passed or the responsible individual had disappeared from the scene.

The turbulence arising over issues of internal corruption that had disrupted Antwerp's political life so markedly in sixteenth century and earlier became less obvious in the seventeenth century. For the seventeenth century "there was no mention of such scandals [as that involving van Heyden in the sixteenth century]."⁴⁴ Nonetheless, even in the relatively calm seventeenth century, waves of disgruntlement and indignation agitated a surface of civic peace; charges of corruption set them in motion. Sometimes the incidents seem inconsequential or even silly. They provided, however, moments of political confrontation and expressed deeper-seated hurts as they inserted themselves painfully into still-running civic ulcers. For example, in 1632, the exciting moment arose from the rumor that among the treasurers "several were corrupted with gratifications and meals."⁴⁵ This charge may seem (almost literally in the second instance) small beer, but just this kind of niggling vexation frayed political tempers. The significance of small matters lies elsewhere, not only in Antwerp, of course. Politically, it often made good sense to allow fights to brew up over trivialities. Although mole-hill-sized disputes could unexpectedly shoot up into mountains,

⁴³ Prims, 8: 248.

⁴⁴ Leo van Buyten, "Theorie en praktijk voor de financiële instellingen van het Ancien Régime, de verborgen aspect van het rentmeesterschap," in *Recht en instellingen in de oude Nederlanden tijdens de middeleeuwen en de nieuwe tijd: Liber Amicorium Jan Buntix* (Louvain: Universitaire pers, 1981): 549–66; Hugo Soly, *Urbanisme en kapitalismus te Antwerpen in de 16de eeuw: De stedenbouwkundige en industriële ondernemingen van Gilbert Schoonbeke* (Brussels: Gemeentekrediet van België, 1977); Soly, "Fortificaties"; Timmermans, *Patronen*, 76.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Edmund Geudens, *Het hoofdambacht der Meerseniens, godsdienst en kunstzin, liefdadigheid, burgerdeugd*, 4 vols. (Antwerp: Dela Montagne, 1891–1904), 1: 176–9.

they also allowed battles be fought by proxy without touching off major explosions. Minor issues could preoccupy major political players and keep them off balance with the need to respond to charges.

While some magistrates remained impervious to such challenges or batted them away like tiny annoying insects, not everyone enjoyed that immunity or possessed that skill. Charges, moreover, often did not directly target major figures but their protégés, associates, and, in the parlance of the day, lackeys. One should not, however, underestimate the criticality of what seem to us incredibly petty, even risible battles. Complaints about festive meals (*Maeltyden*) could, of course, simply be a swipe at a luxurious or opulent lifestyle conducted inappropriately or even corruptly at public expense. Complaints about unseemly ostentation, however, fostered disgruntlement that possessed a far sharper political edge. Verbal sparring, insults, and even blows sometimes disturbed even the most solemn occasions or convivial events.⁴⁶ The use of the term *beloften*, or promises, indicated, of course, a damaging charge of favor, although promises alone were not considered corrupt. Inappropriate pledges of assistance, however, *were* generally viewed as corrupt. Thus, commitments made but not kept usually provoked the loudest cries of foul.

Misdirection of funds remained, however, the main occasion for complaint. Those who collected taxes and fees for the city often fell prey to the temptation of turning money to other than intended purposes or withheld it from the treasury entirely. In a city where battles over taxes and the use of civic money continued to mar relations with Brussels, such cases bore real, as well as symbolic, meanings. Two cases, both from the middle of the eighteenth century, demonstrate the petty corruption that plagued the urban administration, excited commentary, and textured political life, while frequently splintering it.

The first noteworthy incident involved the controller of the wine excise, Jan Baptist de Pretere, who, in 1731, had “sworn an oath of loyalty and [promised] faithful service,” but instead had proven “false and deceitful.” The lengthy testimony taken in the case revealed how he worked his scam: he collected the excise-tax from merchants and wrote out proper receipts. He then pocketed the fees. It seems clear, as well, that Pretere and the merchants colluded and that he accepted less from them than they properly owed.⁴⁷

The wine excise office apparently oozed corruption, Pretere was hardly its only official who “used public money for their own needs or their own luxuries, or stuck it in their purses.”⁴⁸ Another controller, Henricus van Bronchorst, found himself in a similar, if more serious, situation eleven years later: he was suspected “of several corruptions and crimes in his official capacity and otherwise.”⁴⁹ Employing “various sinister means,” he had stolen a substantial

⁴⁶ As happened on the “Vrouwendach maeltyjd” in Amsterdam in February 1656. Bontemantel, 2: 118.

⁴⁷ FA, V 93; FA, V 162. ⁴⁸ “Memoire,” n.d. [1732?] in FA, V 93.

⁴⁹ “Proclamatie,” from 22 November 1743 in FA, PK 2849 and FA, V 101.

sum from the state over the course of four or five years.⁵⁰ A fellow controller, Joseph Botermans, related that Bronchorst had admitted to him that he had doctored the books in order to deceive Botermans who brought the case to the attention of the authorities, possibly to avoid being accused of collusion.⁵¹

The tally sheet of those who used their offices to turn a nice profit or to cover their debts was a lengthy one. In 1784, Joseph Puttemans, a high official with the treasury of the Estates of Brabant, was on the run. He had started out as a clerk in the office, became assistant cashier, and then chief official in 1772. Since 1767, he had managed to swindle some ƒ50,000. Described as “a most practiced thief” and “notorious bankrupt,” he personified corruption.⁵² More frequent, indeed probably innumerable, were the far smaller matters, the everyday petty peculations, such as that of a gatekeeper defrauding the city of fees collected at the Croonenburg gate.⁵³ As single incidents, they rarely evoked major responses or serious discord but, and especially in fraught times, they touched off bigger fights. When a particular post or office seem especially riddled with corruption or threw up repeated instances of malfeasance, those once petty matters grew into juggernauts that could knock even the greatest and most powerful off his feet.

The situation of Johannes (or Jan) Baptista de Wolf in 1790 demonstrates how entangled business, government, and private life became in these scandals. De Wolf appears in a later chapter as a bankrupt; here, as a corrupt official. De Wolf held in succession two major venal offices in Antwerp: Treasurer and Receiver-General. The latter counted “at that time as one of the most important in Antwerp’s administration.” The Treasurer managed finances for the city: his office drafted budgets, audited the books, added up income, authorized expenditures, supervised the city’s public works, and oversaw taxation. De Wolf occupied these positions throughout most of the 1770s and 1780s and into the early 1790s.⁵⁴ In 1791, he was accused of having defrauded the city of “very considerable sums,” including over ƒ60,000 from taxes collected over a decade. All in all, the total he had diverted to his own use amounted to about ƒ142,000.⁵⁵ What was surprising about the case was just how many officials had long been suspicious of De Wolf and held more than an inkling of his frauds. Jean Beauduin, another financial office-holder, knew that De Wolf’s books did not balance and that quite a bit of money had gone astray. When confronted with these charges, De Wolf’s response demonstrates with somewhat alarming candor how often he had channeled public money into his business.

⁵⁰ Details on the Bronchorst case in FA, V 101 and V 162. ⁵¹ In FA, V 101.

⁵² FA, V 164, fols. 117–32, here fol. 118. ⁵³ FA, V 119.

⁵⁴ “Naamlijst der Rentmeesters en Tresoriers van Antwerpen,” *Antwerpsch Archievenblad* (1875): 386–401, quote 386; Jan Denuncé, “Tresoriers en tresorij. Inventaris,” *Antwerpsche Archievenblad* (1934): 11–51, 81–108; Boumans, 112–18. De Wolf was Treasurer in 1775, 1776–7, 1781–2, and 1787–90 and Receiver-General in 1772–4, 1778–80, and 1784–7.

⁵⁵ “Ticht en Conclusie,” from 27 January 1791, FA, V 164, fol. 291; “Insolvente Boedelskamer,” *Antwerpsch Archievenblad* (1930): 11.

He had begun modestly, by “borrowing” sums to cover his own debts. He had “invested” (his word) tax money in his own affairs and acknowledged that he possessed “some thirty or more bills of exchange that had been protested.” He blamed his financial need on the revolution, that is, the Brabant Revolution of 1789–90. He found himself in no position, therefore, to make good when the fiscal year closed on 4 June 1790.⁵⁶

Not only Beauduin knew about these irregularities; no lesser men than the First Burgomaster and the Pensionary were equally cognizant. Jacob della Faille, the burgomaster, along with Beauduin, had cautioned De Wolf already in August. De Wolf admitted that at that time “he was unable to restore the missing funds” either in whole or in part. He went on to inform them that “he had used the tax money for his own affairs and had no idea when he could make satisfactory restitution.” The Pensionary, Nobertus Josephus Bom, also became involved and then he, Beauduin, and Della Faille confronted De Wolf together with his son-in-law and business partner, J. Valentýns. De Wolf now pleaded for a little more time because he expected “very soon” to receive “considerable sums of money” from his own debtors. He remained, however, quite vague about when he thought the repayment could be completed or even commence, sometimes projecting months, sometimes years. He had already mortgaged his house to the city for *f*12,000 “as surety for the receiver-general position.”⁵⁷ Obviously, De Wolf had repeatedly dipped into the urban cash-drawer to support his business. Not only had he covered momentary shortfalls with it; he actually speculated on new ventures. In 1782, for instance, he merged his business with the Solvyns company to form “Solvyns, De Wolf and Co.” Some forty Antwerp merchants held stock in the enterprise and the list of participants reads like a Who’s Who of respectable mercantile and political society.⁵⁸

A host of similar incidents fills to bulging the catalog of frauds and misdirection of funds in Antwerp’s official world during the long eighteenth century. Whether they were more or fewer, less or more egregious, than elsewhere remains impossible to assess. In cases involving a major figure and one with deep roots in the mercantile and political worlds, like De Wolf, many people knew of, or strongly suspected, that all was not well. Clearly, De Wolf’s meetings with Beauduin, Della Faille, and Bom represented attempts to retrieve the money and allow De Wolf to extract himself honorably, or at least quietly, from a tight spot. Only when he proved unable to do so and, indeed, only when he actually fled Antwerp, did the scandal break. Despite the size of De Wolf’s default and his prominent position, no major blow-up occurred. Perhaps the times – this all occurred during the Brabant Revolution – proved too tense and bigger political events drew attention away from De Wolf. Perhaps

⁵⁶ Statement given on 6 September 1790, in FA, V 123.

⁵⁷ Statements of 6 and 16 September, 16 December 1790 in FA, V 123.

⁵⁸ “Insolvente Boedelskamer,” 12.

the moment had passed for civic indignation or perhaps his friends protected him and did what they could to defuse the matter. Whatever the reason, the De Wolf debacle did not launch a major political debate.

Even when one gathers some idea of how frequently malfeasance in office occurred, it remains exceedingly difficult to judge the degree of systemic corruption in Antwerp. Were these incidents just the tip of an iceberg whose size we can no longer plumb? Or were cases of corruption merely sporadic and accepted with a certain equanimity bordering on indifference? One might argue that the several events discussed here amounted to little, or were nothing exceptional, and were ones that vexed virtually all societies. Where Antwerp diverged from Amsterdam and Hamburg is that in the two larger cities similarly corrupt practices in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provided moments of quite intense political upheaval and constituted a notable portion of the political action and discourse of the day. That situation only characterized Antwerp in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Perhaps the explanation for the relative lack of momentous dust-ups over corruption within the city can be sought in the political landscape Antwerp inhabited. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the hot political moments differed substantially in Antwerp compared to Amsterdam and Hamburg. Political tinder in Antwerp caught fire in the struggles with the central government over matters such as new taxes, attempted centralization, and reforms that touched, or threatened, first, financial integrity and customary political liberties, and then, later, and especially under the Josephine initiatives, religious life and social practices. Naturally enough, these concerns could fuel internal political troubles, but the heat thus generated rarely melted the ties binding together political elites in either the magistracy or the administration. The persistent economic woes of the city and its financial friability evoked far greater concern among merchants and governors alike.

Amsterdam: dirty politics or “harmonie”?

Antwerp’s position within larger empires compromised its status as an early modern republic. While the local magistracy retained much control over internal urban affairs and was by no means impotent, the government in Brussels assumed a real and sometimes controlling presence. The very composition of the urban government, in which princely officials remained central to the daily exercise of power, the significant percentage of noble magistrates, and the centralizing initiatives of the Brussels government meant that Antwerp’s political life often marched to rhythms others set and experienced different pressures than did either Amsterdam or Hamburg.

While one can no longer accept without qualification the old view of Amsterdam as the all-powerful puppet-master in the Dutch Republic or even in the province of Holland, able to force its will on the others, nonetheless, its position as *primus inter pares*, combined with its control over the largest of

the East India chambers, inevitably meant that the Republic’s political life and Amsterdam’s political life coincided and frequently clashed. The conflict between the states’ party and the prince’s party forms only the most obvious manifestation of this duality.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, despite the effect that the stadhouder could have on Amsterdam by removing magistrates and naming others as occurred in the several forced changes of government (*wetverzettingen*) of 1618, 1650, 1672, and 1748/9, his ability to intervene never meant that the Amsterdam regents were not masters in their own house. For all practical purposes, Amsterdam governed itself. In that process, the regent families were critical; in their capacity as the “governors of Amsterdam,” they decided all urban policies, picked their own colleagues, and determined who else partook of power in the city and of how much.

Traditionally, scholars have ascribed the dominance of the regents as embedded in, and emanating from, the contracts of correspondence, although the first written contract only appear in Amsterdam quite late, in 1752. Nonetheless, systems of patronage and clientage had long determined the distribution of offices, jobs, and positions and had often provoked contestation and strife among elites. One early twentieth-century opinion held that contracts were superfluous because the ascendancy of the burgomasters and the hold of the regents on political power were already complete. Accordingly, the 1752 contract merely codified practice within the magistracy and the distribution of offices at almost every level.⁶⁰ The contracts aimed at mitigating or even banishing discordance. The burgomaster Nicolaes Geelvinck valued the 1752 document as a way “to halt all intrigues and party building” and to avoid the factionalism that weakened the regents vis-à-vis the stadhouder.⁶¹ Perhaps that was the intent. However, aggressive and frequently debilitating in-fighting persisted. Political power-brokering in the vroedschap assured the ascendancy of the burgomasters and the regents, but the distribution of other jobs and offices still touched off conflicts that even the written contract of 1752 could not prevent.

Later observers have often viewed the political horse-trading that characterized business within the vroedschap with a jaundiced eye. Johan Elias opened

⁵⁹ The dichotomy presented here may be heuristically useful but it is far too simple. There were no firm party lines and people often moved back and forth from one side to another, as Lieuwe van Aitzema observed in the middle of the seventeenth century. See Herbert H. Rowen, “Lieuwe van Aitzema: A Soured but Knowing Eye,” in Phyllis Mack and Margaret C. Jacob (eds.), *Politics and Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honour of H. G. Koenigsberger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 174. The debate over parties and factions is a long and complicated one, see Wout Troost, *William III, the Stadholder-King: A Political Biography*, trans. J. C. Grayson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 8–12; Roorda, *Partij en Factie*; Israel, 748–58.

⁶⁰ Nico J. J. de Voogd, *De doelistenbeweging te Amsterdam in 1748* (Utrecht: H. de Vroede, 1914), 35, 37.

⁶¹ “Declartoir” quoted in *ibid.*, 242; Elias-2, 226–32 (quote, 226). The contract – “Pointen van Orde” – took effect on 6 March 1752.

his monumental work on the vroedschap with a comment on the “not very attractive picture” the governors of Amsterdam presented. Elias maintained that since the end of the Revolt, “a narrow circle” controlled the Dutch cities and denied all others any say in political and civic matters. Each city, and most of all Amsterdam, provided a “spectacle of unbroken manipulations and intrigues, whereby family feuds played a principal role.”⁶²

His judgment has merit. The burgomasters’ virtual stranglehold over access to the higher circles of governing and their ability to distribute numerous other offices cemented the foundations of their power. By the mid seventeenth century, the results of elections had become foregone conclusions; the process itself a complete humbug. If some contemporaries deplored and criticized these political machinations, the nineteenth century pressed them into a now-familiar mold of corruption. In 1897, G. W. Kernkamp bought out a comprehensive edition of one the most informative political memoirs ever produced: Bontemantel’s *The Government of Amsterdam*. In his introduction, Kernkamp conceded that it was not Bontemantel himself who painted a picture of thoroughgoing corruption in Amsterdam’s government, but rather “I created it through my readings of what is found scattered throughout his [Bontemantel’s] writings... He wrote about the corruption of his fellow regents as if it was the most natural thing in the world [and] an essential part of government.”⁶³

Nineteenth-century critics of these arrangements, like De Witte Citters and Robert Fruin who wrote voluminously on the topic, used the phrase as a euphemism for corruption.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, and despite his clear disapproval of the contracts as they developed over time, even Citters identified praiseworthy motives in the intentions that had called them into being. Remarking upon a 1631 agreement from Middelburg, Citters saw the regents tapping their way toward more elaborate contracts “here perhaps with no sense of doing anything wrong” but rather with the goal of stabilizing government and diffusing conflict.⁶⁵ Yet, the history of political life in Amsterdam (and other cities in the Republic) over the long eighteenth century reveals often quite drastic shifts in ruling cliques. Even the most prepotent burgomasters in Amsterdam, such as the brothers Cornelis and Andries Bicker, Andries and Cornelis de Graeff, Gillis Valckenier, or Coenraad van Beuningen could lose their hold and be banished to honorific but relatively powerless positions, despite extensive alliances and strong bonds of friendship, especially when, as in the case of the Bickers, they

⁶² Elias-I, xxxiii. ⁶³ Bontemantel, I: xxxi.

⁶⁴ See Citters, *Contracten*; Robert Fruin, “De Correspondentien van regenten in de Republiek,” in P.J. Blok, P.L. Muller, S. Muller (eds.), *Robert Fruin’s verspreide geschriften: Met aantekeningen, toevoegsels en verbeteringen uit des schrijvers nalatenschap*, 10 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1899–1905), 9: 186.

⁶⁵ Jacob de Witte Citters, “De voorlopers van de contracten van correspondentie,” *Nederlandsche Spectator* (13 July 1867): 219.

aroused the wrath of the stadhouder. One goal of the contracts was, therefore, to prevent these shake-ups.⁶⁶

In the political world of Amsterdam, charges of corruption became integral parts of the maneuvering *within* the vroedschap, rather than, as in seventeenth-century Hamburg, between the Bürgerschaft and the Senate as both strove for power and attempted to alter or clarify the constitutional structure according to their own understanding of urban republicanism. In the 1560s in Amsterdam, charges of nepotism and corruption in the distribution of vroedschap positions often arose among those already near the well-cushioned seats of power. The leaders of a 1564 protest complained of the “great abuses that occur in the government of this city” and isolated five major offenders, noting the “consanguinity and affinity” among the thirty-six members of the vroedschap that allowed them to distribute offices as they pleased. The ringleader was Hendrick Dircksz., “the great Monarch” who acted “like a Kaiser within the city.”⁶⁷ Complaints about the corrupt practices of one or another circle frequently singled out a Machiavellian figure as the wellspring of all troubles. Isolating individuals as responsible thus stressed specific misconduct rather than fastening on structural flaws. The goal of these accusations lay not in altering the dynamics of governing or reconfiguring relations between its component parts, whereas in Hamburg that was *exactly* what charges of corruption entailed. In Amsterdam, even when such charges resulted in the ouster of one man or group from power, the basic government form retained its shape and validity. Thus, when malcontents of the 1560s came out on top in 1578 with the shift to Protestantism and support for the Revolt (the famous *Alteratie*), the new men acted much like those who had just been shoved out of power or relegated to a perhaps respected (albeit considerably less powerful) office to await another reversal of fortune.⁶⁸

Such changes occurred not infrequently in Amsterdam and determined the tenor of political life. That political life, however, proceeded as normal, even under new men, and was not mere hypocrisy. It demonstrated how political modifications could be effected by charges of corruption without actually delegitimizing the existing governmental structures. Of course, new circumstances generated different meanings of corruption. In the mid to late eighteenth-century climate of perceived economic decline and political emasculation, corruption became the rallying cry of first the Doelisten and then the Patriots who sought major reforms in government. In an attenuated form,

⁶⁶ Israel, 607; Elias-2, 136 describes how, within the space of two years, the powerful Bickers brothers were rendered impotent by shifting them into honorific offices where they had little political clout.

⁶⁷ Elias-2, 9–12. See also J. J. Woltjers, “Het conflict tussen Willem Bardes en Hendrick Dirckszoon,” *BMCN-LCHR* 86 (1971): 178–99.

⁶⁸ Elias observes that “no less than the . . . old patriciate in other cities of Holland did the new-baked patriciate in the Amstel city honor the ‘aristocratic’ tradition.” Elias-2, 25–7.

one can find like demands among those termed radicals in Hamburg in the late eighteenth century.⁶⁹

Even earlier, charges of corruption provided combustible political tinder. By 1600, Amsterdam was bursting at the seams and speculators had built extensively, and illegally, outside the city's boundaries. The regents convened a commission to consider options. One member was Cornelis Pietersz. Hooft who protested vociferously about those who blatantly manipulated office for their own gain and acted like monarchs of all they surveyed.⁷⁰ In the protracted and contentious debates that followed, Hooft spoke against the avarice of colleagues who sought to recast the terms of the expansion to maximize the profits they expected from land speculation. Hooft, like his contemporaries, viewed corruption in terms of individual malfeasance. He accused the burgomaster and Public Works Director Frans Hendricksz. Oetgens of pulling strings to arrange the selection of a pliable treasury official: "his own benefit is here involved and . . . he means to grab great riches for himself out of this business."⁷¹

Predictably, nineteenth-century commentators usually valorized Hooft as a man who "opposed the evil schemes" of many self-interested regents. For them Hooft embodied "that type of regent who treasured the common good above his own" even while, of course, holding the "honest conviction" that "the wealthiest, most honorable, and most notable persons' were the best qualified to govern city and state."⁷² This moralism of hindsight has its flaws, even if we are willing to accept that some men proved more ethical than others. Apotheosizing Hooft as a folk-hero does not quite work, however. Principled his protest might have been, but it was also a *seventeenth-century* protest,

⁶⁹ Nico Randeraad and Dirk Jan Wolfram observe that "[c]omplaints about the all-pervasive nepotism and corruption greatly contributed to the crisis of the [Dutch] Republic in the last decades of the eighteenth century." "Constraints on Clientelism: The Dutch Path to Modern Politics, 1848–1917," in Simona Piattoni (ed.), *Clientelism, Interests, and Democratic Representation: The European Experience in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 101; Israel, 1098–121; Simon Schama, *Patriots and Librators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780–1813* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1977); Wayne te Brake, *Regents and Rebels: The Revolutionary World of an Eighteenth-Century Dutch City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Nico C. F. van Sas, "The Patriot Revolution: New Perspectives," in Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand Mijnhardt (eds.), *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 91–122; Cornelis H. E. de Wit, *De strijd tussen aristocratie en democratie in Nederland 1780–1813: Kritische onderzoek van een historisch beeld en herwaarding van een periode* (Heerlen: Winants, 1965); Cornelis H. E. de Wit, *De Nederlandse revolutie van de achttiende eeuw: Oligarchie en proletariaat* (Oirsbeek: Lindebauf, 1974).

⁷⁰ Elias-2, 25. More recently, Jaap Evert Abrahamse, *De grote uitleg van Amsterdam: Stadsonwikkeling in de zeventiende eeuw* (Bussum: Thoth, 2010), 85–94.

⁷¹ "Deliberatie op de verder vergrotinge ende fortificatie van dese Stadt. Anno 1612 in Aprili gevallen," quoted in N. de Roever, "Tweeërlei regenten," 69; Abrahamse, *Uitleg*, 88–90.

⁷² Elias-2, 25; De Roever, "Tweeërlei regenten." That is the general picture a 2010 treatment of the subject also presents of Hooft: Abrahamse, *Uitleg*, 88, refers to him as "a formidable opponent" of the speculators.

one focused on individual wrong-doing. He did not attack the system per se from which he also benefited; he had little desire to recast its deeper structures. Hooft was, after all, a “declared supporter of the aristocratic-republican form of governing” and believed categorically that “the aristocratic regime is for us the most necessary and the safest [one].” He fully accepted the role of the burgomasters as “fathers and guardians,” the men best placed to guide the city and look after its greater welfare.⁷³

The dimensions of the intra-elite fighting that crystallized around discourses of corruption appeared more obvious seven decades later. Once more a Hooft, this time, Henrik Hooft, was involved. He and his colleague, Cornelis van Vlooswijk, vigorously opposed the draft of a Unity Concept (*Concept tot eenigheid*, in effect, a contract of correspondence) brought before the burgomasters in May 1676. It contained fifteen “points of agreement” calculated to solidify the supremacy of the burgomasters “for all time.” Fundamental conditions limited the number of burgomasters to no more than twelve and tightly controlled the circulation of men through these posts. Hooft and Vlooswijk objected vehemently to the content of this particular Unity Concept but also expressed dislike of “all other contracts by which the regents are able to bind their supporters more closely to them in order to obtain their own objectives.” They further argued that such agreements “not only offer no benefits but in fact create occasions for more troubles and greater disaffection” throughout the polity and within the broader ruling elite.⁷⁴

Behind what may seem a disinterested condemnation of dirty politics, however, lay a deep political divide. The four burgomasters who put forward the Unity Concept – Joan Huydecoper, Jan Munter, Cornelis van Outshoorn, and its mastermind, Gillis Valckenier – were political adversaries of Hooft and Vlooswijk. Jonathan Israel has pointed out that the “rivalry between Valckenier and Hooft deprived the city of much of its capacity to make its weight felt” in ongoing conflicts with Willem III. The Hooft-Vlooswijk resistance to the Unity Concept and the corruption they identified in it by no means struck at the underpinnings of regent government in Amsterdam. Rather, they feared that this agreement could be used to ostracize them and their clients from power or at least to reduce their influence measurably. Like the opposition voiced by Cornelis Pietersz. Hooft, that of Hendrik Hooft and Vlooswijk did not seek to shift the fundamentals of Amsterdam’s government or to expand in any significant way the catchment area of participants in it. Little could better substantiate this conclusion than the fact that, by early January 1677, the two quarreling groups reconciled their differences in a new accord (although

⁷³ Elias-2, 55, 55n4 (Hooft quote).

⁷⁴ Israel, 821. Fruin notes that the “party chiefs” found ways, “also in the absence of formal contracts, through which concord (*eendracht*) could be re-established,” Robert Fruin, “Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het burgemeesterschap van Amsterdam tijdens de Republiek,” in Blok *et al.*, *Verspreide geschriften*, 4: 325.

not, apparently, a formal written one) to regulate the future selection of burgomasters; both Hooft and Vlooswijk participated.⁷⁵

Other instances demonstrate how charges of corruption functioned within the framework of Amsterdam's government, as well as showing how contemporaries defined corrupt practices. They highlight the dangers of reducing corruption to a sport only elites played. The fluidity of the term, indeed the fluidity of the perception, is striking and corruption often rippled outward from elite circles to cause disturbances further afield. Although the meetings of the *vroedschap* were confidential, it would be foolish to think that leaks did not occur. As always, fiscal responsibility (or the lack of it) and the distribution of offices most frequently occasioned extended commentary on what proper government and its function were to be in the Republic.

In the 1640s and 1650s, the towering political figures in Amsterdam were the Bicker brothers, Andries (1586–1652) and Cornelis (1592–1654). In the first half of the seventeenth century, the intermarried Bickers-De Graeffs exerted the greatest influence of all regent families. Although that iron grip loosened by mid century, the Bickers and De Graeffs remained central political players until 1672; the great pensionary and statesman, Johan de Witt, successfully sought the hand of their niece, Wendela Bicker, and married her in 1655. The elder brother, Andries, held all the normal powerful positions in the city: member of the *vroedschap*, burgomaster, director of the East India Company, and diplomat. His brother, Cornelis, who, exceptionally for a man of his political stature, never belonged to the *vroedschap*, was nonetheless selected burgomaster three times. The Bickers strongly supported the republican or states party in Amsterdam and opposed strengthening the power of the stadhouder. (It was the coup of Willem II in 1650 that turned the Bickers out of power.) At one moment, seven Bickers – the Bickers league – simultaneously exercised political functions in the city. Bilderdijk's nineteenth-century opinion has mostly stood the test of time: "Amsterdam . . . [was] ruled by the Bickers [*sic*]." Their opponents came from the powerful alliance of three other regent families: the Pauws, the Schaeps, and the Valckeniers.⁷⁶

The fall of the house of Bickers by no means halted the charges of corruption within the magistracy that underlined political debates and exposed the competing ambitions of regent families. In the scuffling of the late 1660s and early 1670s, the figure of Gillis Valckenier (1623–80) stood out. Although originally a supporter of the Eternal Edict (1667) that separated the stadhouder from military command, in the 1660s Valckenier became a supporter of Willem III. His political volte-face greatly benefited him when Willem III assumed power in the wake of the French invasion of 1672. On Valckenier's advice, Willem turned

⁷⁵ Fruin, "Bijdrage," 4: 320–35.

⁷⁶ Brugmans, 3: 205, 223, 261, 4: 420–3; Bilderdyck, 9: 244 (quote); A. M. H. Smeenge, "Wendela Bicker," *Amstelodamum* 35 (1938): 89–97.

out sixteen members of the Amsterdam magistracy, including Valckenier’s personal opponents and the last members of the Bickers league: Hendrik Hooft, Andries de Graeff, and his nephew Peter de Graeff. By 1678, Valckenier’s influence had peaked. The English observer, William Temple, believed him the veritable ruler of Amsterdam. But Temple’s observations were often touchingly naive for he also wrote of the burgomasters (an office with, he noted, “the Charge of the greatest Trust, Authority, and Dignity”) that, despite their very small salaries “none of them are known to have taken money” upon selection because such would cause them “to lose all their Credit in the Town.”⁷⁷

Almost all regents stocked their political armory with the weapon of corruption and rarely hesitated to deploy it. When in 1670, the commissioners in charge of the military reported on the desire to cashier 400 men, Valckenier used the opportunity to lash out viciously at one opponent, Cornelis Backer. Valckenier accused Backer of corruption “in the naming of directors of the East India Company” as well as having schemed to prevent a nephew of his from being selected for the *vroedschap*. Valckenier continued, characterizing Backer

[as] a man . . . who looks primarily to his own interest, and thus wanted to make Thijssen Director because he is married to his wife’s aunt and . . . because Thijssen as a director would advise that the profits should be distributed and that would benefit [Backer] who held many shares, but not the Company.⁷⁸

Corruption as a rhetorical tool and a wider political *casus belli* thus grew ever more prominent in the eighteenth century. Scholars have often cited corruption as a major contributing cause to the Doelisten uprising in Amsterdam in the late 1740s. That fraught decade witnessed a series of tumults driven by economic and political concerns. The system of tax farming had evoked great anger against the tax farmers but also against the regents. In late June 1748 in Amsterdam, rioters broke into and plundered several tax farmers’ homes. In the ensuing *melée*, perhaps as many as two hundred people were trampled or drowned. The strength of the passions that arose can perhaps be well illustrated by an event that occurred almost fifteen years later, in December 1761. Upon the death of an erstwhile tax farmer, a raucous crowd gathered outside his house and caused all sorts of uproar and “irregularities.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Brugmans, 3: 180–4; 4: 436–44; Roorda, *Partij en factie*, argues that corruption was, at least before 1672, “still very unusual,” at least among the burgomasters. If “one ‘favored his own friends’ . . . no one thought the worse of it.” Thus, he also felt that Temple’s observation was, more or less, correct (48). It depends greatly, of course, on what one considers corruption and the foregoing examples, noted by both contemporaries and historians, seem to suggest that Roorda’s opinion needs revision. William Temple, *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands* (London: A. Maxwell, 1673), 80.

⁷⁸ Bontemantel, 146n.

⁷⁹ Israel, 1072–4; Rudolf Dekker (ed.), *Oproeren in Holland gezien door tijdgenoten: Ooggetuigeverslagen van oproeren in de provincie Holland ten tijde van de Republiek (1690–1750)*

The diary entries of Jan de Boer also reflect these stormy events. His record substantiates how corruption played out in day-to-day politics and, by then, it had taken on broader and more strident tonalities. Even after the Doelisten movement died down, the political pot simmered and corruption charges stoked the flames. In August 1751, Boer recorded an incident “which caused great distress among the citizenry”: the flight of the beer-excise collector, Abraham Martens, with *f*300. The next month it was the collector of the wine excise, Pieter Reijers, who was caught with his hand in the till.⁸⁰ In October 1752, Boer learned that yet another collector, a man named Abraham Boudeaux, had been removed from his office for “absconding with public money”; the sum was thought to be about *f*2000. Boudeaux claimed that another reason better explained his dismissal; the government was seeking to reduce the number of officials and a charge of corruption proved a convenient pretext for removing supernumerary collectors. In listening around, Boer learned that many merchants considered Boudeaux friendly and pleasant, if perhaps somewhat lazy. Boer’s probings also turned up another reason for the attack on Boudeaux: he had refused to acquiesce in a request of the Receiver General who thus punished Boudeaux for his “disobedience” and “lack of respect,” and, apparently, for his unwillingness to cooperate in a money-skimming racket.⁸¹

All these mini-events interlaced themselves into the actuality and aftermath of the Doelisten movement. The Doelisten movement evades easy pigeon-holing and several very different groups identified with it. It included radical and moderate democrats as well as those who supported the prince’s party against corrupt regents; most leaders came from the respectable ranks of middling men. The porcelain merchant, Daniël Raap, took the lead in Amsterdam. Basically a moderate in his political stance, Raap nonetheless called for four major reforms: declaring the stadhoudership hereditary in the female as well as male line; restoring the guilds to their old powers; electing officers of the civic militia by their companies instead of being selected by the burgomaster; and, finally, selling city offices to the highest bidder. All represented overt political claims; the last two attempted to rectify what many contemporaries perceived, and publicly discussed, as a system rotten to the core. Sale of office was intended to short-circuit the control regents exercised over myriad positions in Amsterdam. The return of the guilds to their traditional positions of power likewise formed a constitutional issue; it meant to restore their rights of representation in government. Raap also called for the stadhouder (Willem IV) to replace

(Assen: Gorcum, 1979); Lajb Fuks, trans. and ed., *De zeven provinciën in beroering: Hoofdstukken uit een Jiddische kroniek over de jaren 1740–1752 van Abraham Chaim Braatbard* (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1960). Description of the riot at the tax-collector’s funeral in NJ (December 1761): 1225–9.

⁸⁰ Boer, 307, 309–10, 316 (16 August; 4, 14, 16 September; 6 November 1751); *Copie, van een merkwaaardige Missive, schreeven door den cluchtende Collecteur Pieter Reierzs, uit het land van onrust, aan zyne Respectieve Mama, Mi Pan-aal, op den 14 Augustus 1751*, Knuttel 18320.

⁸¹ Boer, 340–2 (23 and 24 October 1752).

the then-sitting regents. His dismay was great when this actually happened because many of the same families or the same groups reappeared in power. These events are well known and many historians have treated them at some length as a precursors to the Batavian/Patriot Revolution of the 1780s.⁸²

In Amsterdam, the privilege of the burgomaster to sell or give away a huge number (some 3200) offices and positions fed much opposition.⁸³ It is hard to tell if abuses had become more flagrant or simply more remarked and resented as a newer attitude toward public morality developed. Writing in the 1830s, the historian and poet, Willem Bilderdijk, argued that the criticism of corruption, or at least, of the deformities in the political system caused by favoritism, had achieved their most intense expression in Amsterdam by specifically targeting “the hangers-on of the magistrates and their families” and the “numerous city offices and trade [in them] they all had part of.” The Admiralty, too, was apparently shot through with corruption. Such under-the-table deals had become rampant, resulting in, it was charged, an unnecessary multiplication of jobs “that became ever more expensive [to obtain].”⁸⁴

The tumultuous 1740s therefore produced a copious flow of corruption complaints, ones that received very public airings and which were frequently sparked by notorious cases that inflamed public discourse. Critics protested that, for example, the burgomaster Andries Bicker had given his son Hendrik an office worth f4000–5000 annually. Even more labyrinthine was the scheme cooked up by the finagling burgomaster Lieve Geelvinck to make sure that his son, Nicolaas, became Receiver-General. Geelvinck first persuaded the current holder of the position, Balthasar Scott, to step down. As reward for his compliance, Geelvinck backed him for selection as burgomaster. Another ploy allowed minors to receive lucrative positions, or else positions were left vacant; the burgomasters then pocketed the income.⁸⁵

It seems clear that plenty of political dung lay around to raise quite a stink, but whether such corruption actually affected the quality of government – nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers were fully convinced it did – or not remains unclear. Of course, numerous laws and ordinances defined a range of practices as corrupt and prohibited them. The *Placaat* of 1650, for example, forbade all those under the oath of office and “their house-wives, children, or

⁸² Israel, 1070–1; Brugmans, 4: 81 (demand for sale of offices). Raap’s differences with others who sought reform also made him hated. There was a riot at his funeral and he had to be buried quickly at night. According to the diarist Bicker Raye he was “thrown like a beast into his grave” (entry of 10 January 1754). The eighteen demands of the *doelisten* were printed in 1748: “Aan de weledle grootachtbaare heeren burgermeesteren en de vroedschappen der stad Amsterdam,” Knuttel 17971.

⁸³ Theodor Bussemaker, “Lijst van ambten en officiën ter begeving staande van burgemeesteren van Amsterdam in 1749,” *BMGN-LCHR* 28 (1907): 474–518.

⁸⁴ Bilderdijk, 11: 136–7.

⁸⁵ Voogd, *Doelistenbeweging*, 41–5; Elias-1 discusses such cases at length, see especially 1: cxl–cxli.

anyone else” from “taking, receiving, or enjoying” benefits, real or immaterial. Neither they nor their relatives were to engage in any “trade or sale” of offices on pain of loss of position and further punishment. The list of things forbidden officials to receive or enjoy included food and drink.⁸⁶ In 1715, the Estates of Holland promulgated an “Ordinance Against Corruption and Against the Receiving or Giving of Gifts, Presents, or Tokens.” Perhaps merely for form’s sake, the Estates emphasized how such dubious practices had produced “evil and scandalous rumors.” In order that such suspicions should “not fall upon the entire government” one must hunt out the guilty and punish them.⁸⁷

Corruption of the sort and magnitude discussed here, that is, the distribution of posts and offices, caught many people in its net. Numerous individuals, from the top to the bottom of the social pyramid, had a hand in the giving, getting, and brokering of posts and jobs. Thus, the system actually *benefited* many, even if there were always some who felt cheated. Charges of corruption moreover cut in virtually all political directions; those who once cried “corrupt” could later find themselves the targets of similar attacks. After the end of the Doelisten troubles, the leaders of the movement rapidly found themselves the objects of general dislike and hatred, especially when Willem IV introduced new taxes and when a number of the ex-Doelisten received posts as collectors. Raap’s funeral provoked an outpouring of vilification and he was, according to Bicker Raye, “thrown like a dumb beast into his grave.” The hatred against the collectors was strong and they were vilified as “worthless people” and slotted into the same category as “crossed-grained churls” and bankrupts.⁸⁸

Corruption formed a central factor, therefore, in the major uproars of the mid eighteenth century or, at the very least, corruption functioned as a useful rhetorical and political device. Individual cases illustrate the dimensions and offer the best inroad into developing a more sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of political culture in early modern urban republics. In the early eighteenth century the perception grew that dealing in offices, or endowing one’s relatives with lucrative ones, had become ever more common and differed from the way in which such offices had been distributed earlier. Bontemantel, despite relentlessly itemizing how burgomasters trafficked in positions in the highest circles of government, had nothing to say about outright (and illegal) sale of office as a money-making business which specifically profited

⁸⁶ Aitzema, 7: 373–4.

⁸⁷ *Placeat Tegens de corruptien, en tegens nemen en geven van giften, gaven en geschenken* (The Hague: Paulus Scheltus, 1715), 1–3.

⁸⁸ Voogd, *Doelistenbeweging*, 226–7, 229, 232–7 (quote 229); Bicker Raye, 10 January 1754. Raap’s death provoked the publication of a large number of vilifying pamphlets. See, for example, *Op het afsterven de valschen privilegiezoeker D. Raap, eerste belhamel en voorganger der oproermakers van ’t jaar 1748. overleeden den 11 January 1754. en des nagts tusschen den 15 en 16 de klok drie uren door een witpaart op een slede of horde gevolgt door dienders en ratelwagts na de Oude Kerk* (n.p.: n.p., 1754), the title of which indicates his character as a “crawler” and the turmoil that surrounded his burial.

the burgomasters. He did relate how, if a burgomaster had a lucrative office in his gift, he arranged “in silensie” that the recipient donate a sum – known as “old-women’s money” – each year to charity. The practice later became rule and formed a kind of tax levied on all such offices.⁸⁹

Of course, the children and grandchildren of burgomasters could benefit more directly and more substantially from, for example, a postmastership. Jan Six presented his newborn son a double such post worth over *f*11,000 annually as a christening present and Willem Munter saw fit to endow each of his young grandsons – the oldest was 4 – with half a postmaster post. The 8-year-old offspring of Harmen Henrik van de Poll held two: for Gorkum and ‘s-Hertogenbosch. In 1737, Hendrik Hooft, son of the burgomaster, Daniël Hooft, received 50 percent of the very lucrative Hamburg postmastership. The annual income families drew from these dealings mounted up to quite substantial sums; the van de Polls, for example, earned over *f*35,000.⁹⁰ Still, others who actually exercised the office (and paid for that right) also profited. Moreover, it is by no means self-evident that such corruption resulted in poor service or even jacked up costs.

Whether an overt trade in offices was really unknown in the seventeenth century remains an open question. Evidence from the eighteenth century demonstrates just how the trade proliferated and how lucrative it could be. Besides the postmasters, other offices were handed on under conditions that favored members of burgomaster families with a regular annuity. The burgomaster Geelvinck endowed Pieter Bernard Texier with the position of “courier to Leeuwarden and Friesland” on the explicit understanding that Texier pay Geelvinck’s sister *f*200 annually. Another burgomaster, Ferdinand van Collen, allowed Lammert Banning the job of lime supplier in return for *f*50 paid annually to one of van Collen’s more distant relatives.⁹¹ To what extent contemporaries perceived this as corrupt, or, more importantly, what *part* of the transaction was perceived as corrupt, raises entirely different questions. While no doubt exists that the political upheavals of the mid to late eighteenth century used the rhetoric of corruption to attack the regents, one also should understand that many involved in the transactions at the receiving end were not distressed by the system itself but rather distressed by its dislocations, as an examination in detail of two cases makes clear: that of Sautijn-de Haze de Georgio and Muys van Holy. These instances offer considerable insight into the perception and function of corruption in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Amsterdam.⁹²

⁸⁹ Voogd describes this practice and notes that there was a regular scale of donations from an annual fee of *f*100 for the more important offices well down the list to less than *f*10 for the lesser ones. *Doelistenbeweging*, 43; Bontemantel, 134n1.

⁹⁰ Voogd, *Doelistenbeweging*, 45. ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹² The case is described in *ibid.*, 46–8; 117–23; Jan F. L. Balbian Vester, *Burgemeesters van Amsterdam in de 17e en 18e eeuw* (Zutphen: W. J. Thieme & Cie, 1932), 122; and Elias-1, cxlii–cxlv, 576–8; Elias-2, 203–8, among others. Additional sources include “Requête,” in SA,

Local historians almost always trot out the Sautijn-de Haze de Georgio affair when they wish to emphasize the depth of regent corruption. The early twentieth-century journalist and local historian, Jan F. L. de Balbian Vester, regarded it “as indicative of the arbitrariness of the regents under which Amsterdammers . . . suffered.”⁹³ Actually, it better illustrates the *breakdown* of a patronage–clientage system. By focusing on the middlemen (and women) involved, their actions, expectations, perceptions, and words, as well as upon those who sought jobs and positions, we can listen in on how people outside the regent groups helped create and maintain a system of preferments.

The three central figures in this rather shabby drama were all puissant men. The burgomaster Jeronimo de Haze de Georgio counted as the richest man in Amsterdam in the early eighteenth century. He, like his compatriot burgomasters, had been deeply involved in the trade in offices and posts for years. The Sautijn brothers, Willem and Nicolaas, were his prominent political opponents. Nicolaas Sautijn, when burgomaster, had blocked the earlier appointment of De Gregorio to that same office. Nicolaas’s brother, Willem, held the rank of colonel in the militia and a directorship of the East India Company. Local historians have generally viewed him as a speculator up to his neck in risky and dubious, perhaps even criminal, financial affairs. When he needed money, which was often, he sold jobs to raise it. Various middlemen and middlewomen conducted the actual transactions. But there is little honor among thieves and when Sautijns’ relations with these helpers broke down, De Gregorio seized this golden opportunity to wreak vengeance on them.

Still, as was so often the case, it was not the Sautijns themselves but their facilitators – in particular, a German resident named Pieter Backer and a woman named Evertje Vlaming – who suffered the real consequences. Backer was eventually declared “infamous, and ineligible to hold any [further] offices, posts, or benefits.”⁹⁴ The exact guilt, innocence, or even complicity of Sautijn cannot be irrefutably fixed although it seems self-evident that he had deeply involved himself in taking money to arrange appointments for particular people; the euphemism most frequently employed was the verb “helping.” If Sautijn got off, it was not scot-free; enough dirt clung to him to blacken his reputation and he was never again elected burgomaster. Willem, however, continued to fill political and civic offices and he also continued to be a lightning rod repeatedly attracting charges of corruption and malfeasance. For instance, in later years he was involved in a scandal over his misuse of the Amsterdam Admiralty Yard for private work.⁹⁵

Bibliotheek, F, Haze de Georgio, de; 1713; “Stukken inzake Mr. W. Sautijn, bewindhebber der O.I.C. terzake van het verkopen van ambten en andere mesusen in officio,” from 1731 in NA, 3.03.01.01 inv. nr. 5428.17; “Ratione officii Eyscher in Cas Criminell . . .” from 1 November 1724 in SA, inv. 5061, 641a.

⁹³ Vester, *Burgemeesters*, 122.

⁹⁴ “Ratione officii Eyscher in Cas Criminell . . .” from 1 November 1724 in SA, inv. 5061, 641a.

⁹⁵ Lucas Willem Kramp, *De Krampiäna, of verzameling van alle volgeestige werken die van, voor en tegen Lucas Willem Kramp het dagblicht hebben gezien, voor zo verre dezelve in dit formaat*

If Sautijn really used his position as burgomaster and East India Company director to run a thriving business in positions (as seems likely), he never dealt with those seeking posts directly, but worked through intermediaries such as Backer and Vlaming. The business was proactive; Backer and Vlaming assiduously sought out people who might want a particular job or who could be persuaded that one lay within their grasp. They also provided the muscle if needed and arranged what today would be called the terms and even the financing, setting up loans and providing bills of exchange, properly drawn up, notarized, and endorsed. Clearly, they made their living in whole or in part from this business. Many jobs on the block involved the ships and the offices of the East India Company, such as the “position as commander [going] to India” for Willem van Rÿpen for f800 in 1719 or the assistant factor’s post produced for Gerrit Welthoven in 1721 for f3500, but the trade extended virtually throughout the world of public positions from high to low.⁹⁶

Nothing suggests that most of the people so “helped” were incompetent or that others had acquired their posts more honestly. Nor is there necessarily any sense that recipients found the system, in its structure at least, in any way improper, corrupt, or wrong. Some seekers’ qualifications proved questionable and that is perhaps why they turned to Backer and his associates. The negotiators found Jan Pieterse Kayser a shipmaster’s position with the East India chamber in Enkhuizen because his physical disability, “a palsied hand,” was known in Amsterdam. The middle “man” in this case was Evertje Vlaming and she presented a vivid picture of how the mediation proceeded. Sautijn asked her “if she knew him [Keyser] and if he was a good man.” With her approval, Sautijn went ahead and procured the post for him but stipulated that he required f2000 for doing so.⁹⁷

Other witnesses provided additional information on the trade. Elisabeth Simons, the wife of Frans Bol, detailed what they were expected to do after Sautijn had secured a position for her husband as a helmsman on an East India ship. In a statement to an Amsterdam notary, Simons explained that in return for the position, the couple had to give Willem Sautijn gifts and these consisted “principally of the very best tea, bolts of muslin, Japanese and other porcelain, and various merchant goods.”⁹⁸

The same mediators, who accommodately arranged loans and bills of exchange did not shy away from extorting more money or bullying those who found it impossible to pay on time, as Joost Broekhuysen and Treÿntie Alderts

zyn uithekoomen... (n.p., n.d. [1748]); Lucas Willem Kramp, Voorlooper eener wettelycke verantwoording van Lucas Willem Kramp, commis van 's Land Magazyn en Timmerwerf tot Amsteldam wegens een verschil tusschen hem ter eenre ende Willem Sautyn equipagemeester en John May, scheepstimmermansbaas van de andere zyde ter zaken van 's Land dienst in den jare 1761 ontstaan, etc. (Amsterdam, 1764).

⁹⁶ All in SA, inv. 5061, 641a.

⁹⁷ Interrogation done by Commissarissen of Hof v. Holland, “ter requisitie van den Procureur Generael” of Evertje Vlaming, from 31 May 1735, NA, 3.03.01.01, inv. nr. 5428.17.

⁹⁸ Statement from 6 January 1725, in *ibid.*

found out to their dismay when they dealt with Vlaming and another of her group, one Frans de Ridder. The couple had sought a Chandler's position for their son. When Vlaming demanded more money than originally agreed, they refused, and then received an unwelcome visit from De Ridder (clearly one of the enforcers) who threatened to take them to court over the non-payment of the bill of exchange. Jan Pieterse Keyser also learned how unpleasant dealings with such mediators could be. Keyser had twice before obtained a commander's position on borrowed money. The price for the second post was f800–1000 and, when he experienced difficulties in raising it, one middleman, Jan Ockersse, told him point-blank: "the man who raised you up can also take you down." Then, late one night, "the clock having struck ten and as he and his wife were getting ready to go to bed," Backer and Ockersse appeared at his door "and demanded with much intensity the immediate payment of the full amount."⁹⁹

The extensive testimony and statements produced more information on how the trade developed over time. Aletta Wadson, for example, described to a notary how Sautijn had appointed her late husband, Jan Sero (or Seroen), master of a ship going to the East Indies. For this captaincy, he had to pay a sum of f3000 or f3200. The money was advanced by Cornelis van Vlamingh (Evertje's brother) in December 1717 and a notary drew up the bill (*obligatie*); in 1722, the sum was paid. Her husband told her that a bit of horse-trading had taken place to assure his success: in order to make the post available, Sautijn had to barter with another director, exchanging the right to distribute a captain's post for a factor's.¹⁰⁰

In all these instances, the complaints that surface, when they came to light at all, struck not directly at the idea of trading in offices per se, as the beneficiaries, the benefactors, and the mediators were all equally complicit. Friction occurred when the recipient experienced difficulty raising the money or paying it back or when the mediators got greedy and tried to collect more than originally agreed. The beneficiaries of such deals could hardly protest to the authorities. Their legal position was weak because the bills they had signed did not specify what the money was to be used for and payments in kind proved virtually impossible to trace. Thus, the system was a closed one that did not allow for judicial recourse without self-incrimination. The real sticking point in these and all similar negotiations came when clientage–patronage networks or ties of friendship and favors crossed. For every Keyser who obtained what he desired, someone else did not.

Accusations of corruption that raised significant issues of political and civic propriety by no means only emanated from intra-elite conflicts, involved miscarriages of justice, or consisted of an illicit trade in offices and positions. Muys van Holy, the contentious lawyer discussed in [Chapter 1](#), became deeply

⁹⁹ Statement from 1 July 1725, in *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Statement/deposition of 25 July 1724, in *ibid.*

involved in a situation that he judged illegal and corrupt and that offended his sense of burgher duty and civic propriety. In the 1680s, Muys had protested against rampant and destructive speculative practices. An incident in 1707 distressed him far more. This *cause célèbre* involved Jan Geerkens, a Lutheran, who had amassed a vast fortune in the Indies. On his return to Amsterdam, he married Louise Bleau from a regent family. He died soon afterward, leaving an estate of more than *f*100,000 to his widow on condition that if she wed or died, the proceeds would be distributed equally between the Lutheran church and orphanage.¹⁰¹ Clearly, upon her remarriage in 1681 Louisa should have turned over what remained of Geerkens's estate (still a quite substantial sum) to the orphanage. Despite being appointed one of the first regentesses of the orphanage in 1680, Louisa and her second husband had quietly pocketed the money.

When Muys got involved in the case as a legal intermediary, he became aware of the true provisions of Geerkens's will. He then launched a one-man crusade to have the money properly reallocated.¹⁰² His efforts eventually involved him in an increasingly acrimonious exchange with Bleau's lawyer, Jacob de la Bassecourt, a man of considerable influence and later the city's pensionary. The quarrel effectively terminated Muys's public career. For the publication of pasquinades and for other “libelous acts,” the magistrates condemned him to the city's workhouse where he died in May 1717. A pamphlet he wrote from prison argued that his sentence offended the Republic's “dearly bought freedom” and destroyed “true republicanism,” because “not only is a person permitted to expose monstrous [crimes] and grave transgressions,” it required that each citizen do so “in order to preserve the common good [*ten gemeenen beste*].” Where such “evildoing and deception” [*malversatie en falsiteiten*] were tolerated, no republic could long stand, he raged.¹⁰³

Muys's protests appealed to a sense of civism or civic duty that supposedly animated, or should have animated, the governors and citizens of Amsterdam alike. The misuse of funds by the heirs of Jan Geerkens formed only one part

¹⁰¹ Details on Jan Geerkens's life are taken from “Onder de hoede van de Zwaan,” *Ons Amsterdam* 13 (1961): 162–3 and Jakob Loosjes, *Luthersche weldadigheid: Overzicht van de weldadigheidsinrichtingen en fondsen in de Lutherse gemeenten in Nederland* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1924), 5. The will of Jan Geerkens is appended to *Brieven van Mr. Nicolaes Muys van Holy, Advt. aan Diakonen, Kerkmeesteren, en Regenten van het Weeshuis der Luterse gemeente binnen Amsterdam: De tweede Druk* (Amsterdam: J. Crellius, 1706 [first published in 1705]), 37–41, Knuttel 15540; also in SA, Bibliotheek, F Muys van Holy, N. Enveloppe 1.

¹⁰² *Brieven*, 9.

¹⁰³ *De Navorscher* 7 (1857): 239–44 describes the case against Bleau (or Blaau) and her second husband. Muys's response appeared as *Eisch en Conclusie van . . . Gerbrand Pancras Michielsz. Hooft-Officier der stad Amsterdam, Requirant in cas van Reauditie, tot Arbitraire Correctie van Mr. Nicolaes Muys van Holy, Gerequireerde; Met des zelfs Antwoord daar tegen . . .* (Amsterdam: H. Bruyn, 1708), 3, 6–7; see also Muys's extensive testimony in SA, inv. 5061, 358.

of the problem; even more serious in Muys's eyes loomed the involvement of the deacons of the Lutheran church and the city's government in the affair. He also accused the directors of the church and orphanage of connivance through silence. He hit them hard, blaming them as well for the mishandling of funds.¹⁰⁴

Muys may have been a Jeremiah and a thorn in the side of regents and respected members of the community alike, but he was neither a wild-eyed eccentric nor a lone voice crying in the wilderness. Certainly his detractors employed in print the homonymic "Muys-muis-mouse" to emphasize his pettiness. Nonetheless, many others saw in him a defender of rights and justice: a Dutch Socrates condemned for his principled stance. A verse at his death, for example, panegyricized him: "Here lies a man who could get no justice from the law," the last defender of the poor and abandoned in the state.¹⁰⁵

Muys might have gotten off more lightly had he not long been a gadfly pricking the regents' consciences and had he not mixed in the bigger political confrontations between the city and the stadhouder in the 1690s. It hardly helped his cause that he involved himself so prominently in the turmoil swirling around the publication in 1691 of Balthasar Bekker's *The Enchanted World*. As this debate assumed greater political dimensions, it involved Muys in an all-out war with one of the most prominent pro-Orangist propagandists and engravers: Romeyn de Hooghe.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Muys's battles against corruption and fraud, as well as his tilting at the windmills of speculative practices, resonated with deeper political and civic tonalities.

¹⁰⁴ See the series of relevant pamphlets in Knuttel: 15540–15542, 15544, 15621–15622, 15624, 15730–15734; *Brieven*, 9, 29, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Two satirical contra-Muys pamphlets include: *Brief Van den Heer Richardus Scheffers Med^e. Doctor. Aan zynen Vriend den Heer, en Mr. Nicolaes Muys van Holy, Advt., Tot Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: P. Visser, 1706), Knuttel 15544 and the same author's *Tweede Brief, Van Richardus Scheffers, Med. Doctor, aan den Hr. en Mr. Nicolaas Muis van Holy Adt. Hoogeleeaar, en ongeoctroyeert Practisyn in subtile en noit gehoorte quaestien* (n.p., n.d.), in SA, Bibliotheek, F Muys van Holy, N. Enveloppe 2(9). The first offered the epigram in Latin and then Dutch:

Patruient montes, nascetur ridiculus MUS.
De bergen gaan bevrugt, en maken groot dedruis.
Zy baaren, en wat dog? een' klynen schraalen MUIS.

Muys also had defenders, such as Johan Coenraad Amman, *De Verdediging van Socrates wyt het Grieks van Plato vertaald, en opgedraagen aan den zeer geleerden Heer Mr. Nicolaas Muys van Holy, Advocaat, door zyn Ed. gants verplichten dienaar en getrouwen vriend...* (Amsterdam: Robert Blokland, 1709), in SA, Bibliotheek, F Muys van Holy, N Enveloppe 4(25). Handwritten "Gedichten op 't Afsterven & Grabschriften op Mr. Mr. Nikolaas Muys van Holy, Rechtsgeleerde," in SA, Bibliotheek, F Muys van Holy N. Enveloppe 6. Quote comes from the piece numbered 11.

¹⁰⁶ Evenhuis, 3: 258–305; Jonathan Israel described De Hooghe as "the foremost engraver of the later Golden Age, [who] was also a leading Orangist propagandist [and] who published numerous engravings exalting the exploits of the Stadholder in the field" (Israel, 856). On the pamphlet war, see C. van de Haar, "Romeyn de Hooghe en de pamflettenstrijd van de jaren 1689–1690," *TVG* 69 (1956): 155–71.

The leitmotif was the association of fraud, speculation, and breach of faith. Persons who speculated, cheated their fellow citizens, or misappropriated funds violated the standards of republicanism that men like Muys held to be the surest guarantors of true freedom. Certainly the discursive elements demand attention, yet these battles were not merely texts whose meanings need to be unpacked; they were real events, initiating governmental action and kindling public reactions. At these precise moments we see how locals spoke of corruption specifically, attaching it to particular individuals and identifying single events and incidents as base causes as did Muys and the various principals in the De Georgio–Sautijn fiasco. Everyday discourses and actions resulted in civil suits or initiated criminal prosecutions; virtually all turned on individuals or single instances even when there also existed back-stories. These moments were not the mere surface manifestations of more deeply seated corruptions but their very marrow; they were not incidental to politics and political discourses but absolutely central and were even able, as in Hamburg, to fracture civic peace.

Hamburg: corruption and civil strife

Conditions external to both Amsterdam and Antwerp influenced political life, if in conspicuously different ways. The governors of the Spanish and Austrian Netherlands exerted considerable authority over Antwerp and a good deal of that city's political life evolved in response to initiatives emanating from Brussels, Madrid, and Vienna. Amsterdam's position in the Dutch Republic and the larger ambitions of the stadhouder shaped its politics. Nonetheless, vis-à-vis the rest of the Republic, Amsterdam held a very strong hand and, at crucial moments, could determine, or at least strongly affect, the politics of the Republic as a whole.

Hamburg presents yet another variation on these themes. Of all three cities, the actions of other states least encumbered and least molded its internal politics. Hamburg completely controlled, for example, the selection of its magistrates and appointments to other posts. No nobles sat in its Senate or attended convocations of the Bürgerschaft. As a Free Imperial City, Hamburg formed part of the Holy Roman Empire, but the imperial link remained a fairly tenuous one and only in times of deep civil strife did the Empire intervene directly in internal urban affairs. In short, and to a very great degree, Hamburg's inhabitants controlled their own urban and civic destinies. Common here, as to Antwerp and Amsterdam as well, however, was the thread of corruption as a major political issue and common, too, was the nesting of political life within the interstices of unique governing structures. These interspaces nurtured different possibilities for politicking and significantly affected the timing of politically hot moments as well.

Political wrangling in seventeenth-century Hamburg virtually always rose up in the interactions between the Senate and the Bürgerschaft and charges of corruption frequently ignited them. A Recess between the Senate and the

Bürgerschaft concluded in 1410 (often, albeit misleadingly, entitled Hamburg's "Magna Carta"), delineated the rights and the position of the Bürgerschaft vis-à-vis the Senate, guaranteeing citizens protection against arbitrary arrest and confinement.¹⁰⁷ The basic history of contestations between the two bodies can be traced through the texts of succeeding recesses. Gradually, these agreements came to structure Hamburg's constitution by regulating relationships between the Senate and the Bürgerschaft. Nevertheless, compromises instantiated in these recesses rarely halted political strife or even stifled debate. Instead, their very provisions offered moments for reinterpretation and dissent over what they supposedly clarified. Three issues, however, repeatedly disrupted civic life: differing opinions on religious exercise, corruption, and access to political participation. Moreover, from the mid fifteenth century onwards, periodically "citizens found . . . the attitude of the Senate overbearing" and this grievance formed the point where discussions over the meaning of civic republicanism and fears of its corruption quickly become obvious.¹⁰⁸

Until the Long Recess of 1529 (concluded in the wake of Reformation), much discontent revolved around the lack of a permanent body to represent the Bürgerschaft.¹⁰⁹ Although the Senate retained the right to convene the Bürgerschaft, the Long Recess elevated parish officials – the aldermen – to "permanent political representatives of the Bürgerschaft," while simultaneously guaranteeing that only the accord of the Bürgerschaft (or its deputies) made decisions binding. In 1563, the Bürgerschaft forced the Senate to transfer the administration of finances to a committee of eight citizens (*die Achtmänner*, later the *Kämmerei*). The power-sharing arrangement codified in the Long Recess and the 1563 agreement formed the basic constitution of the city until the middle of the seventeenth century when disagreements arose and when serious constitutional conflicts, exacerbated by religious wrangling, touched off virtual civil war.¹¹⁰ A 1699 *Manifesto on Civic Freedom* précised the

¹⁰⁷ *Hamburg*, 123–5; Heinz Stooß, "Rat und Bürgerschaft in Hamburg am Ausgang des Mittelalters," in Wilfried Ehbrecht (ed.), *Städtische Führungsgruppen und Gemeinden in der werdenden Neuzeit* (Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau, 1980), 357–68.

¹⁰⁸ Jürgen Bolland, *Die hamburgische Bürgerschaft in alter und neuer Zeit* (Hamburg: n.p., 1959), 14–15.

¹⁰⁹ On the Reformation in Hamburg and its impact on governing, see Rainer Postel, "Reformation und bürgerliche Mitsprache in Hamburg," *ZVHG* 65 (1979), 1–20; Rainer Postel, "Obrigkeitsgedenken und Reformation in Hamburg," *AR* 70 (1979), 169–201.

¹¹⁰ Bolland, *Bürgerschaft*, 14–16. In general on these developments, see *Hamburg*, 269–87, 358–65; Geert Seelig, *Die geschichtliche Entwicklung der Hamburgischen Bürgerschaft und die hamburgischen Notabeln* (Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem, 1900), 55–102; Nicholas A. Westphalen, *Geschichte der Haupt-Grundgesetze der Hamburgischen Verfassung*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1844); Nicholas A. Westphalen, *Hamburgs Verfassung und Verwaltung in ihrer allmählichen Entwicklung bis auf die neueste Zeit*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1846); Friedrich Voigt, *Der Haushalt der Stadt Hamburg, 1601 bis 1650* (Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem, 1916); F. Georg Buek, *Die hamburgischen Oberalten, ihre bürgerliche Wirksamkeit und ihre Familien* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1857).

Bürgerschaft's agenda and highlighted the issues around which the battles revolved. The *Manifesto* argued that "in Hamburg there is only one estate, namely that of the assembled Bürgerschaft, which includes all other collegial bodies selected and empowered by the aforementioned Bürgerschaft."¹¹¹

Thus, from the middle of the sixteenth century until the promulgation of the Principal Recess in 1712, the question of whether the Senate exercised powers that the Bürgerschaft did not possess animated political life and embittered political discourse. Did the Senate stand above the Bürgerschaft or was the Senate only the highest servant or executive arm of the Bürgerschaft?¹¹² As early as 1602, the tone of exchanges between Senate and Bürgerschaft on precisely this point had become rancorous. The Senate vigorously asserted its right to rule *over* the Bürgerschaft and not in partnership with it. When the Bürgerschaft accused the Senate of misusing power, of corruption, and of imperiousness, the Senate responded that "even if the highest authority [in a state] is godless, tyrannical, and corrupt, so it is nevertheless not the place of its subjects to resist or reject [its authority] . . . and it is also not right for subjects to set *statuta* for their superiors but rather [they should] render proper obedience to them." Such pronouncements failed to cow the Bürgerschaft and its members indignantly maintained that their prerogatives anteceded those of the Senate.¹¹³

These debates reveal varied and shifting positions in the understanding of what political participation meant and what a republic, or at least a *Hamburg* republic, was. If by 1712 a bargain had been struck, in defining the mixed constitution that anchored sovereignty in both Senate and Bürgerschaft simultaneously, decades of strife preceded it and molded its tenets.

Conflicts over constitutional forms and the exercise of political authority thus dated from the late Middle Ages but various events of the sixteenth century (especially the Reformation) and the seventeenth century (international tensions, religious conflict, and internal power-struggles) ratcheted them up and inflamed rhetoric. In each confrontation, corruption reappeared as a principal cause of tension, often in charges that the Senate had corrupted the proper distribution of power in the polity by arrogating to itself an unacceptably large portion. Repeatedly and vigorously, the Bürgerschaft complained about rampant corruption in the Senate, questioned its right of cooptation, and criticized overt partisanship in the distribution of offices. An especially painful burr was the traditional formulation of the oath of office which, according

¹¹¹ *Die so wohl in gemeinen kayserlichen, als ihren absonderlichen Statuen- und Recessen-mäßigen Rechten unümsstößlich gegründete Hamburgische Bürgerliche Freyheit: Oder Gründliches Manifest und Darthung*, unpag. (n.p., 1699). According to Manfred Assendorf, this was written by August Wygand and published by Christian Reymers in Altona. "Der Fall Wygand oder: Von der Bürgerrechtsbewegung zur Demokratie, Ein Beitrag über Hamburger Verhältnisse des 17. Jahrhunderts," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 18 (1989): 379–414, here 413.

¹¹² Seelig, *Entwicklung*, 63. ¹¹³ Westphalen, *Geschichte*, 1: 4–5.

to the Bürgerschaft, did not sufficiently acknowledge the Senate's restricted position as the executive organ of the Bürgerschaft and not a separate, superior, and independent authority.¹¹⁴ Hans-Dieter Loose expressed the progress of the conflicts concisely, viewing the history of Hamburg throughout the seventeenth century as "marked by continuous, increasingly bitter conflicts between Bürgerschaft and Senate. The Bürgerschaft desired and demanded greater rights, while the Senate was unwilling to admit any limitations on its position."¹¹⁵

Particularly fraught was the administration of finances. Accusations of fiscal dishonesty virtually always centered on individual malfeasance. The Bürgerschaft rhetorized corruption as an acid that eroded republican virtues but also seized upon it as a concrete political opportunity to press its agenda. Until the middle of the sixteenth century, two senators had held sole responsibility for all aspects of urban finances. Early in the sixteenth century, and under pressure from the Bürgerschaft, the Senate offered to allow certain members of the Bürgerschaft the right to confer but "did not believe it fitting or expedient" to allow citizens "a closer knowledge" of accounts. The Recess of 1548 empowered several members of the Bürgerschaft, albeit ones chosen by the Senate, to supervise finances, audit the city's books, and advise on incomes and expenditures. These concessions only temporarily placated the Bürgerschaft. The desire for greater oversight remained a recurrent item on the Bürgerschaft's ever-burgeoning list of demands. Charges of financial corruption thus proved major weapons in the Bürgerschaft's arsenal against the Senate in these turbulent years.¹¹⁶

If relative civic peace prevailed from roughly 1560 until the middle of the next century, the squabbling never ceased entirely. It is hard to ascertain why political conflict died down and remained muted for almost one hundred years. For the first half of the seventeenth century, one can point to the threatening international situation in the long build-up to what became the Thirty Years War as perhaps nurturing internal solidarity. Hamburg benefited substantially from the war economically and civil discord did not become truly acrimonious until peace returned. One informed observer of Hamburg's history notes that although the exact causes remain unclear, it seems safe enough to attribute the renewed tumults to "an interaction among social tensions, economic chances, political mismanagement, and religious conflicts."¹¹⁷ Whatever conditions pertained after 1650, quarrels over the exercise of political power and sovereignty in the city could not be bottled up forever and they soon

¹¹⁴ Seelig, *Entwicklung*, 63–7.

¹¹⁵ Hans-Dieter Loose, "Die Jastram-Snitgerschen Wirren in der zeitgenössischen Geschichtsschreibung," *ZVHG* 53 (1967): 7.

¹¹⁶ Westphalen, *Verfassung und Verwaltung*, 2: 1–2, 16; Klefeker, 2: 448–58.

¹¹⁷ Franklin Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte Hamburg und Altona* (2nd edn.; Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1990), 148.

erupted again with greater verbal acerbity and physical force than previously seen.

The Senate's concessions in the sixteenth century had defused much opposition; a favored tactic was to coopt one-time opponents. In the mid to late seventeenth century the Senate's efforts to bridle dissent proved far less successful. The tone of confrontations became shriller, the sense of outrage greater, and the calls for wider political participation more insistent. By the 1680s, the *Bürgerschaft* had gained the upper hand and its understanding of civic liberties and the proper distribution of political power reigned, at least for a while. For the first time since the Reformation, religious issues seriously agitated already unquiet waters.

Unrest had, however, evinced itself even before the delegates congregated at Münster and Osnabrück. In 1641, for instance, the *Bürgerschaft* complained that "without the permission of the Council of Eight Men and contrary to the Treasury Ordinance money . . . has been collected and paid out."¹¹⁸ By 1665, war was declared and citizens, represented by the *Bürgerschaft*, now fought for expanded participation in government. These demands envisioned the re-enfranchisement of social groups, and especially artisans, who had over the preceding decades slowly been excluded from appearing in the *Bürgerschaft*'s convocations. A special *Bürgerschaft* commission set up in these years insisted that "ordinary citizens must be the most miserable slaves" if they countenanced the "corruption, abuses, and crimes" perpetrated within the Senate and by its members without demanding that these "be made public and punished."¹¹⁹

In what became virtually idiomatic rhetoric, the *Bürgerschaft* complained about a series of abuses that had undercut its privileges and suffocated the civic freedoms at the heart of its understanding of how Hamburg's republic should work. Among the problems the *Bürgerschaft* identified as the cancers that ate away at their liberties ranged old enemies: nepotism, the elevation of inappropriate candidates to the office of senator or alderman, and abuses in the administration of justice as well as in finances. The real bone of contention was another one found in all the grievances (*gravamina*); it lay in the Senate's assertion that "its power came not from the *Bürgerschaft*, but [directly] from the Emperor and the Empire."¹²⁰

These seventeenth-century struggles between Senate and *Bürgerschaft* assumed complex forms, involved a potpourri of issues, and demonstrated baffling shifts in fronts and alliances. Many conflicts, as the previous investigations of Amsterdam and Antwerp have established, can best be grasped in terms of personalities and personal animosities. Religion always remained important, if sometimes only as an accelerant, although an especially inflammatory one in the 1690s. Certainly religious issues deeply imbricated themselves into the

¹¹⁸ Hermann Erdmann, *Hamburg vor 200 Jahren oder die Jastram-Snitger'schen Wirren (1674–1686)* (Hamburg: Epstein & Engelke, 1886), 16.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in *ibid.* ¹²⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*

constitutional crisis. If religion remained critical, it was, however, never the sole issue. Its power to disrupt depended on just the ways in which religion had insinuated itself into other deep dissatisfactions of economic or political character.¹²¹ Equally, religious conservatism, orthodoxy, and intolerance of minorities coincided with calls for expanded political participation. The underlying problem had changed hardly at all, although the politically radical agenda that emerged in the late seventeenth century exceeded the challenges the sixteenth-century *Bürgerschaft* had posed. Dissent still revolved around the relationship between the Senate and the *Bürgerschaft*: Was the bond one of sovereign (*Obrigkeits*) to subject or was the Senate merely an executive organ and thus effectively the servant of the *Bürgerschaft*?¹²²

Despite its undeniable vigor, the conflict generally failed to generate the same ringing intellectual defenses of privileges or liberties found in Amsterdam. Rhetoric instead accreted around single instances or around individuals and found expression in a voluminous and voluble *pasquinaderie*. Corruption, nepotism, favoritism, and other improprieties (especially in the realm of justice) produced the best opportunities for the articulation of discontent. Once Pandora's box sprang open, all its evil creatures emerged to sting opponents into action. The *Bürgerschaft* suspected corrupt practices and nepotism everywhere but especially in the 1663 selection of new members of the Senate and reacted by calling into being a special commission – the Fifty-Two – to investigate. A new Recess eventually regulated the selection process and determined the degrees of consanguinity or marital affinity permitted among members of the Senate. These strictures remained in force until the middle of the nineteenth century. In addition, much malignity rankled over perceived abuses in the exercise of justice. Although an imperial commission of 1667 calmed these troubled waters, similar problems perturbed political life for the rest of the century and ended, literally, in bloodshed. Throughout these years, the *Bürgerschaft* refused to relent, insisting that it, and not the Senate, embodied the city's "sovereignty, magnificence, and legitimacy" (*Hoheit, Herrlichkeit und Gerechtigkeit*).¹²³

In the 1670s, enmities sharpened over the selection of senators and aldermen. At this point, however, the fronts began to fracture and eventually splintered into so many factions that clear lines representing fixed positions become impossible to discern. Personal antipathies wove in with political or religious principles and intensified them. The aldermen, once the steadfast representatives of the *Bürgerschaft* *against* the Senate, fell into disfavor with the citizenry and in 1677 the *Bürgerschaft* suspended all of them and one senator, Nicolaus Krull, from office. Eventually two members of the *Bürgerschaft*, Cord Jastram

¹²¹ The best analysis of how politics, economics, and religion entwined is Joachim Whaley, *Religious Toleration and Social Change in Hamburg, 1529–1819* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹²² *Hamburg*, 269.

¹²³ StAHbg, Erbgeessene *Bürgerschaft*, Nr. 1, vol. 3, p. 1029 quoted in *Hamburg*, 271.

and Hieronymus Snitger, took charge. Their *bête noire* was the Bürgermeister, Heinrich Meurer, who resisted the claims of the Bürgerschaft by championing the Senate's rights and laboring to restore that body's much diminished prestige. The Bürgerschaft removed him from office and had him arrested. Meurer sought help from the duke of Celle, while Snitger and Jastram approached Denmark. Christian V proved only too willing to fish in these troubled waters and his support allowed Snitger and Jastram to retain control until 1686. When the Danes besieged the city in that year, however, the populace repudiated the two once-popular leaders. They were executed in October 1686 on charges of treason; Meurer returned in triumph.¹²⁴ Despite the execution of the two ringleaders of revolt, the Jastram–Snitger disorder remained a point of debate between conservative and more progressive or liberal forces in Hamburg throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Were the two demagogues and traitors, or patriots and early democrats?¹²⁵

The civic peace restored with Meurer's return in 1686 collapsed again in the 1690s. New charges of corruption within the Senate and a nasty conflict between conservative Lutheran and Pietist supporters combined to dissolve this very frail compromise. Defenders of Lutheran orthodoxy launched a vigorous pamphlet action against those clergymen who flirted with "dangerous Spenerian heresies," that is, Pietism. The forces of intolerance (directed here against the Pietists) aligned with the forces of civic republicanism. This "Priests' Quarrel" (*Priesterstreit*) stirred the smoldering embers of constitutional conflict and civil war soon blazed. One major skirmish in this prolonged conflict involved the abuse of justice. Legal brouhahas in these decades almost routinely became clashes over constitutional forms, provoking major crises and, eventually, political changes. The "Wygang Affair" proved only the most sensational of these and one that aired in the public arena of print.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ *Hamburg*, 274–81; Loose, "Wirren"; Whaley, *Religious Toleration*, 17–18. A vivid account of what it was like to be a member of the Senate in these years is Johann Schulte, *Briefe des Hamburgischen Bürgermeisters Johann Schulte Lt. An seinen in Lissabon etablirten Sohn, Johann Schulte, geschrieben in den Jahren 1680–1685* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1856).

¹²⁵ This is an exceedingly brief and simplified rendering of the complicated Jastram–Snitger upheaval in the 1680s that had broad constitutional, imperial, and international implications for Hamburg and northern Europe. See Loose, "Wirren"; Erdmann, *Hamburg*; Christian Friedrich Wurm, "Der europäische Hintergrund der Snitger–Jastram'schen Wirren in Hamburg 1686: Aus archivalischen Quellen," *Hamburgisches Akademisches und Real-Gymnasium: Verzeichniss der Vorlesungen* (Hamburg, 1855), 1–42. For the expression of a later, typical anti-Snitger position (this one in verse), see *Hieronymus Schnitger's letztes Thun und Treiben: Unpartheiisch dargestellt von einem hochbejahrten hamburger Bürger* (Hamburg: J. H. Meldau, 1836).

¹²⁶ See Hermann Rückleben, *Die Niederwerfung der Hamburgischen Ratsgewalt: Kirchliche Bewegungen und bürgerliche Unruhen im ausgehenden 17. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Christians, 1970), 247–54, for a concise discussion of the Wygang case. The fullest treatment is Asendorf, "Der Fall Wygang." Asendorf mined not only the many contemporary publications (see list below) but also Wygang's unpublished writings (in StAHbg, Senate Cl.

In 1690, the lawyer August Wygand, once the darling of the Senate, purchased the office of bailiff, a position that seemingly moved him into the opposing camp of the Bürgerschaft. A few years later, the Senate accused him of embezzlement.¹²⁷ Before anyone audited his books, the Senate reacted vigorously, probably unconstitutionally, and, according to the Bürgerschaft, in a prejudiced (*partiisch*) manner; it arrested Wygand and removed him from office. The procedure provoked outrage among the citizenry. The Bürgerschaft mined this sequence of “highly unusual events” for material to use in attacking the highhanded, and allegedly corrupt, behavior of the Senate. Wygand, meanwhile, sought refuge in Denmark. There he consorted with other political refugees from Hamburg. Under the protection of the Danish king, he waged a war of words against the “tyrannous” policies of the Senate, eventually transforming a personal battle into a full-throated hue and cry for deep reforms in Hamburg’s government.¹²⁸

The rhetorical sparring in the Wygand case illustrates the centrality and the utility of charges of corruption in larger political battles. Both sides played the corruption card; each differently. The Senate portrayed Wygand as a crook and a traitor whose venomous publications sought to obscure his own corrupt practices. Wygand cast the case against him as systemic political malfeasance, arguing that the authority of the Senate was illicit and had been acquired only through methodical, coordinated corruption. The Senate refused to play his game, presenting the whole affair as a *criminum falsi* (corruption in office) and deploying *ad hominum* attacks to blacken Wygand’s character. Accordingly, Wygand was a clever opportunist who had married the widowed daughter of the previous bailiff contrary to her father’s wishes. Moreover, it was charged that he speculated in all sorts of “projects,” using illicit profits to repay his creditors but also “to support his luxurious life-style . . . to buy and lay out gardens [and to bet] in high-stakes gambling with cards and dice.” “Against his oath and duty,” he invested legal fees for private gain. He had embezzled

VII Lit Pg4). The affair provoked a flurry of charges and counter-charges in the pamphlet press, see these in the “Lochau Collection,” especially *Dero Königl. Majest. zu Dännemarck Norwegen Gestalten Raths August Wygands Vortrab Der nach und nach von Ihm zu Vertehigung seiner Ehre und Unschuld heraus zugebenden Schrifftten* . . . (Altona?: n.p., 1696) in omnibus volume, StAHbg, Bibliothek 207, no. 13 and further in 207, nos. 16, 24–6, 28–30, 40, 46–8, 50, 53; 208, nos. 38–9, 41–2, 45–7; 209, nos. 25–8; 211, no. 55; and 215, no. 30.

¹²⁷ *Urtheil in Sachen Fisc. In Crim. Anklagen contra Lic. Aug. Wygand Angeklagten, from 10 May 1695, Lit. E in Species Facti; Oder Kurtzer Begriff/ Des höchst straffbahren Betriebs/ und der schwehren Verbrechen/ Des ehemaligen Gerichts-Voigts August Wygands* . . . ([Hamburg], 1699).

¹²⁸ In “Der Fall Wygand,” Asendorf traces the roots of a democratic movement to the late seventeenth century and casts Wygand as a “civil rights campaigner” (*Bürgerrechtler*) *avant la lettre*. While I do not find this interpretation completely convincing, there is no doubt that Wygand was, or became, a committed opponent of the Senate’s “anti-democratic” tendencies, at least as he viewed them.

a sum of 41,829 marks 12 shillings from the bank to enrich himself in dubious deals with a “sly Jew” named Mayer Marx and got away with it until their schemes attracted public notoriety.¹²⁹ The Senate dismissed Wygand’s more expansive counter-charges as “false and fabricated” or “at the most irrelevant.” His “inflammatory remarks,” his “*Discentereyen*,” his charges of the miscarriage of justice, and his characterization of the Senate as an illegally functioning authority were merely the attempts of a thief, a demagogue, and perhaps even a traitor, to deflect attention from the real issue: his own criminality.¹³⁰

In response, Wygand spun out the story of a road-to-Damascus conversion. He admitted that he had originally supported the Senate during the civic troubles of earlier decades, believing the Senate to be the lawfully established highest authority in the polity and that the *Bürgerschaft* had unlawfully engaged in revolt against it. The civic upheaval referred to here was the Jastram–Snitger rising.¹³¹ He saw the light when Jastram and Snitger were executed and when he discovered that the Senate had artfully maneuvered behind the scenes to demonize these two “early champions of civic freedom.”¹³²

In defending himself against the Senate’s charges, Wygand created what must serve as one of the few well developed and well-argued political texts of the time in Hamburg: *A Manifesto on Civic Freedom in Hamburg*.¹³³ Not only, he charged, had the Senate abused his citizen’s rights; it had committed crimes with impunity. Wygand revealed, for example, that since the founding of the Hamburg Bank some “25½ Tonne” of its income had been pilfered and had ended up in private purses. It was, he hinted darkly, not too difficult to figure out who bore the real responsibility for the miserable financial state of the city and the virtual bankruptcy of the Treasury. Such corruption, he added, was inevitable because the Senate lacked all restraint on its powers and illegally arrogated full sovereignty to itself. After thoroughly studying the statutes on which Hamburg’s government rested, Wygand concluded that “sovereignty [the highest authority in the polity] lies with the *Bürgerschaft* and that Senate members . . . were nothing more than the deputies of the *Bürgerschaft*, [empowered by the *Bürgerschaft*] to administer particular tasks including justice.” This correct distribution of political power in Hamburg, however, had been deliberately corrupted by the Senate “using all sorts of clever tricks” that had leached away the *Bürgerschaft*’s power and robbed it of the respect rightly due it. The *Manifesto* thus reiterated the older arguments that “in Hamburg there exists only one [political] class, that of the *Bürgerschaft*.” This position, leveraged by accusations of corruption, effectively settled sovereignty into the hands of the

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3–5, 12. ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11, 31–3. ¹³¹ Wygand, *Vortrag*, 1.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 6–8. Asendorf presents this as an honest change of heart. That may well be true, but it is also true that this was a convenient argument for Wygand to make in the 1690s on his own behalf. “Der Fall Wygand.”

¹³³ *Gründliches Manifest*. See n111 for full title.

Bürgerschaft alone; the Senate served merely as the first servant of the state. Wygand argued that without the restoration of the Bürgerschaft's power "there would never be an end to corruption in Hamburg."¹³⁴

Wygand's case was probably the most striking one in which corruption and its rhetorical power appear critical, but throughout the debate over the construction of political power and its distribution, corruption appeared again and again, and not only in titanic battles like that involving Wygand, but also in myriad other cases. The cases, and their public resonance – in pamphlets but also in discussions within an active Bürgerschaft – in the late 1600s and early 1700s, are numerous. The Spreckelsen–Mors difficulties, the problems of the corrupt bookkeeper, Johann Aldag, and the fiddles at the Bauhof treated in [Chapter 2](#) represent only some.¹³⁵

By 1699, the Senate had capitulated to the demands of a Bürgerschaft whose membership had expanded far beyond its previous limits and that had become far more inclusive in composition than ever before.¹³⁶ Only the intervention of yet another Imperial Commission (the fourth in a century) halted the upheaval and restored the Senate's powers. After four years of wearisome negotiations, the 1712 Principal Recess became Hamburg's "perpetual, immutable, and irrevocable fundamental law." It remained in force, virtually unchanged, for 150 years. The Principal Recess divided power evenly between the Senate and the Bürgerschaft, placing sovereignty in the two organs inseparably. Although the Senate alone initiated legislation, it could not make or alter laws without obtaining the consent of the Bürgerschaft. The Bürgerschaft convened twice a year but only when the Senate summoned it. The aldermen (and to a lesser extent the other collegial committees) thenceforth worked closely with the Senate and carried out all day-to-day business. Only these bodies, and not the Bürgerschaft (now much reduced in size and composed solely of the *Erbgesessene*, the Propertied Bürgers, who met new and higher property qualifications), actually governed.

Article 1 of the Principal Recess attempted to resolve two and a half centuries of constitutional battling over internal sovereignty and the meaning of a republic in Hamburg by mandating that the "*kyrion* or sovereignty lies with the Senate and the Bürgerschaft together and not peculiarly with one or the other part."¹³⁷ While most observers of Hamburg's political development have identified this moment as effectively ending political controversy and sealing the dominance of the Senate, the victory proved less than final. Throughout the eighteenth century, the struggle between the Bürgerschaft and Senate continued if in muted or submerged forms. It still hinged, however, on issues

¹³⁴ Wygand, *Vortrag*, 14; *Gründliches Manifest* quoted in Asendorf, "Der Fall Wygand," 400–1.

¹³⁵ See [Chapters 2–3](#). ¹³⁶ Quoted in Rückleben, *Niederwerfung*, 329.

¹³⁷ Westphalen, *Haupt-Rezeß*, §1.

similar to those that had repeatedly agitated political life over the previous half century.¹³⁸ The number of outspoken critics of the 1712 constitution never amounted to more than a handful and debate migrated to other arenas. About these later moments of indigenous political restiveness, however, the existing historiography has been almost entirely silent.

After 1712, little violence or even strong verbalizations troubled Hamburg's political peace. Historians have suggested several reasons for the prevailing irenic mood. Perhaps one explanation lies in the fact that the Principal Recess was not published in its entirety until late in the century. Scholarly analyses as well as the political commentary of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century have often addressed the political situation that emerged. Joachim Whaley stresses the deep psychological harm done in the previous century as a justification for the supine character of political opposition to the settlement and as clarification for the readiness to preserve peace that all parties demonstrated. Others have praised the 1712 solution as a masterwork of compromise. Undeniably, the intervention of the Imperial Commission and the signing of the Principal Recess poured soothing oil on Hamburg's once turbulent civic relationships. Most eighteenth-century commentators esteemed the "genius" they felt the 1712 solution embodied and appreciated its ability to preserve civic peace. Christian Ludwig von Griesheim, writing in 1760, for example, commented that among the many reasons for Hamburg's prosperity, the most critical lay "in its wise religious and secular government." He lauded the Senate's administrative acumen: "As protected as the city is through [larger] political circumstances against the destruction of its internal constitution, just so much caution does a prudent Senate exert in its conduct." While he conceded that scars incised by the troubles of the late seventeenth century still marred the body politic, he appreciated the good working relationship forged between the Senate and Bürgerschaft and mediated by a series of collegial bodies that functioned as permanent commissions representing the citizenry. His description pictures an idyllic cooperation between a sage and self-assured Senate and a chastened Bürgerschaft that acknowledged the virtues of civic harmony.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Franklin Kopitzsch maintains that throughout the eighteenth century "Senate and Bürgerschaft always came to an agreement," in *Grundzüge*, 150; see also *Hamburg*, 358–60. Martin Reißmann noted that this property requirement excluded the artisans and small merchants from political participation, *Die hamburgische Kaufmannschaft des 17. Jahrhunderts in sozialgeschichtlicher Sicht* (Hamburg: Christians, 1975), 348. Bolland estimated that only 3000–4000 citizens were politically enfranchised, *Bürgerschaft*, 20.

¹³⁹ Christian Ludwig von Griesheim, *Verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage des Tractats: Die Stadt Hamburg in ihrem politischen, öconomischen und sittlichen Zustande; nebst Nachträgen zu diesem Tractate; und Beyträgen zu der Abhandlung: Anmerk. u. Zugaben über den Tractat die Stadt Hamburg, welche selbigen ebenfalls verbessern und gewisser machen* (Hamburg: Wilhelm Drese, 1760), "Erste Vorrede," §§8, 13, 28, 79–80, 85, 99.

What Griesheim here described had even earlier become the reigning orthodoxy on Hamburg's constitutional make-up and on the benefits of its reshaped republican system.

Even as late as 1849, the myth held. When faced with demands for constitutional and democratic reforms in Hamburg's political structure, Bürgermeister Johann Heinrich Bartels, then 88 years old, celebrated the city's existing constitution. While he admitted the necessity of minor alterations and favored "the closing of certain gaps which the march of time has opened," he also contended that the settlement of 1712 should be retained and that "sovereignty [should remain] vested in an enlarged Bürgerschaft and the Senate" to be exercised commonly. He concluded his encomium by insisting that "everything needing modification must be built on the basis of [our old] constitution [and] in its spirit."¹⁴⁰

The 1712 constitution upon which he reminisced so fondly had instantiated a version of republicanism that differed substantially from that the seventeenth-century opponents of the Senate had expressed in words and actuated in deeds.¹⁴¹ When eighteenth- and nineteenth-century observers panegyricized the 1712 solution as wholesome, they returned to the disturbances of the 1680s and 1690s, shuddering over their horrors and contrasting the post-1712 republican solution with the "democratic," "radical," "anarchic," or "mobocratic" ambitions of earlier decades. For them, Hamburg's 1712 constitution had squared the circle, sculpting a republican system that avoided the internal strife and popular violence that contemporaries so often associated with early modern republics and which had marred the city's own recent history. This orthodoxy went virtually unchallenged not only by contemporaries but by generations of historians. For many of them Hamburg was a special case (*Sonderfall*) in the German separate path (*Sonderweg*) – an admirable exception to an exception.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Bartels was elected senator in 1798 and Bürgermeister in 1820. Bartels, *Sendschreiben*, 8–9.

¹⁴¹ Rückleben, *Niederwerfung*; Rückleben, "Rat und Bürgerschaft"; *Hamburg*, 281–7; Whaley, *Religious Toleration*, 19–22; Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 27–8; Bartels, *Sendschreiben*, 8–9. The best treatment of the activities of the Imperial Commission is Gerd Augner, *Die kaiserliche Kommission der Jahre 1708–1712: Hamburgs Beziehung zu Kaiser und Reich zu Anfang des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1983). A late eighteenth-century observer agrees with Whaley's argument about the psychological damage done, although he phrases it more in terms of real fears of political repression: "That since this last Recess [1712] Hamburg can neither hope for, nor fear, additional Recesses. Citizens have learned to their cost just what sort of misery discontent with the Rat... can cause [them]." Jonas Ludwig von Heß, *Topographisch-politisch-historische Beschreibung von Hamburg* (Hamburg: Bachmann und Sundermann, 1796), 3: 280.

¹⁴² Percy Ernst Schramm, *Hamburg, ein Sonderfall in der Geschichte Deutschlands* (Hamburg: Christians, 1964). For a reassessment of the idea of Hamburg as a *Sonderfall*, see Mary Lindemann, "Fundamental Values: Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Hamburg," in *Patriotism, Cosmopolitanism, and National Culture: Public Culture in Hamburg 1700–2000*, ed. Peter-Uwe Hohendahl (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), 17–32.

In analyzing the political and constitutional strife of the seventeenth century, these later commentators often turned to biography. This historical and analytical propensity reinforces the argument that politics in these years continued to evolve out of and around individual instances. The Jastram–Snitger upheaval in the 1680s demonstrates how both sides in the struggle, then and subsequently, parsed constitutional issues through an analysis based on personalities. Cord Jastram and Hieronymous Snitger were two protagonists in that drama; the other major figure was the ousted Bürgermeister, Heinrich Meurer. Meurer became a touchstone for how people positioned themselves politically in later centuries.

In 1709, while the Imperial Commission still labored to hammer out a workable constitutional compromise, a pamphlet appeared in defense of Meurer that presented him in a highly favorable light. At the moment when, according to this anonymous author, the “mob ruled . . . the clever and courageous Bürgermeister Meurer, fearing future dangers, opposed [the rabble] with the greatest vigor” and was rewarded for his pains by being removed from office under a false pretext.¹⁴³ Yet only some valued Meurer’s heroism. Near the end of the eighteenth century, those who wrote in the penumbra of the Atlantic revolutions and in an atmosphere where republicanism enjoyed new fashionability viewed Meurer very differently. In his richly detailed, politically hued *Topographical-political-historical Description of Hamburg*, Jonas Ludwig von Heß mauled Meurer, calling him a “rogue” and a prime example of “those hard, irreconcilable, and egoistic men” who were driven only by “self-interest, greed, and ambition” and who thereby undermined Hamburg’s free constitution. Certainly, when returned to power in 1686, Meurer had vented his spleen on his opponents and sowed much ill will.¹⁴⁴ Only the very real threat of renewed imperial intervention prevented further uprisings. Heß went on to point out that the execution of Jastram and Snitger and the restoration of Meurer with the help of the Empire sounded the death knell for Hamburg’s republican character.

A gloomy, sad stillness spread throughout the city . . . the pleasure of citizens in their constitution was gone, the warm inner satisfaction [they felt] in the enjoyment of their hard-won freedom seemed buried with their dead comrades [Snitger and Jastram]. A party of oligarches had conquered the citizenry with the assistance of a foreign power [the Empire – *sic*!] and only this small group triumphed, ruled, and did themselves

¹⁴³ *Nöthige und auf wahre Facta beruhende Anmerkungen über die anjetzt publicirte peinliche Klage des Rechts in Inquisitionssache . . . wider Dr. Christian Krumbholz, zur mehreren Erläuterung derselben und Behuf der Unkundigen in Eile unterworfen von Sincero Wahrmond* (Hamburg, 1709).

¹⁴⁴ See “Hamburgische Wütherei/ so Die Praedominirende unterm Nahmen Des Rahts und Berichts in denen Jahren 1686. und 1687. ausgeübet an David Crolow/ Deputirten der Erbge-seßenen Bürgerschaft der Stadt Hamburg,” (n.p.: n.p., 1687) in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol., 204, no. 4 and also on the Crolow affair, *ibid.*, no. 5.

proud. Well-intentioned citizens retreated within themselves and withdrew from all participation in urban governance.¹⁴⁵

Heß articulated one version of republicanism, one clearly affected by the events of 1776 and 1789 as well as colored by indigenous reformism. Supporters of Meurer and the 1712 constitution, however, held to an equally attractive model. In the nineteenth century, Bürgermeister Bartels sharply criticized Heß's stance. He sought to rehabilitate Meurer as a misunderstood patriot who fought bravely against political anarchy and whose efforts eventually produced "the happiest combination of freedom and order." He valorized Meurer's endeavors as those of an honest and clear-sighted man who hoped to preserve law and order as well as justice and tradition and who steered a course of political responsibility at great expense to his own reputation, even placing himself in mortal peril. Meurer had restored the republic as Bartels envisioned it. Bartels's definition, while it differed from that of the seventeenth-century opponents of the Senate, formed a valid vision of republicanism and one that remained vibrant throughout eighteenth- and well into nineteenth-century Hamburg. Even those who defended or accepted Heß's portrait and who also found many of Meurer's actions unacceptable, tended to focus on abuses in a generally good system and were less inclined to see the Senate as somehow more corrupt, oligarchic, or power-seeking than other bodies.¹⁴⁶

Bartels was, of course, a member of the Hamburg ruling class. It would, however, be wrong to label him a hypocrite or to assume that the sole legitimate representative of, or spokesperson for, republicanism in Hamburg was the Bürgerschaft, or, indeed, that only one form of republicanism pertained. The Senate, too, embodied and actuated a republicanism based on at least the illusion of power-sharing, order, and concern for economic prosperity and religious peace. Of course, the settlement of 1712 had not secured all these objectives.¹⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the ideas inherent in both forms of republicanism

¹⁴⁵ Heß, *Beschreibung*, 3: 232–3, 237.

¹⁴⁶ Friedrich Gottlieb Zimmermann accused Meurer of a range of crimes: he was a dangerous man who exercised power despotically; he used deceitful measures to get himself elected to the Senate; he favored his friends and relatives; and, in particular, he was the engine that created a ruling oligarchy in Hamburg. *Neue Chronik von Hamburg, vom Entstehen der Stadt bis zum Jahre 1819* (Hamburg: Häßler, 1820), 560; Bartels, *Meurer*, vii, 1. Christian Friedrich Wurm wrote a response to Bartels's pamphlet which he considered "ideologically influenced" (*Partheischrift*). Wurm also saw it as a contemporary (i.e. nineteenth-century) political commentary. Nonetheless, Wurm was distressed particularly by the abuses in government and not by its structure in the seventeenth century. *Kritische Anmerkungen zu der Schrift: "Der Hamburgische Bürgermeister Heinrich Meurer. Hamburg 1836, bei August Campe"* (Hamburg: August Campe, 1836).

¹⁴⁷ Religious discontent continued throughout the eighteenth century although rarely accompanied by violence. Still, in 1719 an anti-Catholic crowd attacked the private chapel of the Imperial representative and pulled it down. Jews and other religious minorities, even the prosperous ones among the Catholic, Mennonite, and French Calvinist communities, suffered restrictions

shared numerous qualities. For example, the republicans of the late eighteenth century viewed the radicals of the seventeenth century in two frequently contradictory ways. To some extent, they acknowledged their forefathers' demands for greater political participation, their concerns for probity in government, and their hatred of tyranny. Nonetheless, they almost unanimously deplored the violence and the religious intolerance that had accompanied these otherwise praiseworthy aspirations.

At least until the end of the eighteenth century, however, there existed almost univocal accord for the prudence and even the perfection of Hamburg's constitution as it had evolved into a stable form. Heß was no starry-eyed admirer of everything that occurred in Hamburg, nor was he a Pangloss; he hardly believed that Hamburg offered the best of all possible regimes. Yet, and despite his criticism of Meurer, he, like many contemporaries, saw much to admire in Hamburg's constitution especially after the experiences and disappointments of the French Revolution. The influential secretary of the aldermen, Ferdinand Beneke, in reacting to a friend's positive evaluation of Hamburg's constitution, took a similar position, insisting that "the good Fettich has it wrong. H[amburg]'s constitution is not perfect, but it is divine when compared to that of Prussia." He identified closely with Hamburg's republicanism seated, he believed, in his very bones. "Here is my native Fatherland, I am a Republican and a Hanseate. So was I born, [and] so I live and die."¹⁴⁸

Political restiveness and demands for greater participation among the citizenry, and especially among those citizens excluded by high property qualifications from the Bürgerschaft, may have provoked some outbreaks of violence after 1712. In the eighteenth century, these outbursts never troubled the body politic as vehemently as they had a century before. In the context of an even tenser international political climate, however, even mild manifestations worried the ruling elites. Moreover, whereas such moments were once dismissed as mere artisan or journeymen unrest, more recently historians have seen in them something more radical and have associated them more closely with the political ideas then stirring the Atlantic world. Others have perceived in these tumults the rising of an incipient proletariat. While these reinterpretations (and especially the latter) go too far in attributing more radical political roots to these disruptions, or in defining them as proto-democratic movements, they surely partook of wider political ambitions at least rhetorically. Organized and violent

and were denied citizenship rights throughout most of the eighteenth century. Jews and Menonites gained civil and political rights only after 1814. Whaley, *Religious Toleration*, 11–13, 168. This was also true in other commercial cities, like Marseille; Junko Thérèse Takeda, *Between Crown and Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 97–104.

¹⁴⁸ Entry from 29 March 1796 in Ferdinand Beneke, *Tagebücher*, ed. Frank Hatje and Ariane Smith (3 vols.; Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 2: 47–8. I would like to thank Frank Hatje and the Beneke-Edition Project (Hamburg) for providing me a transcription of this page before the diaries were published.

street actions mounted after 1750: the cabinetmakers rioted in 1750, the tailors in 1753, the journeymen sugar-refiners in 1766, and finally, most grievously, the locksmiths in 1791. The language such protests spoke was principally economic; participants decried the closing-off of masterships as well as declining wages and worsening working conditions for journeymen and apprentices. Still, the political discourse of republicanism was not absent even if it remained inchoate. The city government passed a series of measures designed to curb the actions of those it termed “troublemakers and agitators.” Many who had initially welcomed the French Revolution agreed and linked their distaste for commotions (*Unruhen*) with calls to reform or abolish guilds.¹⁴⁹

More concealed, but equally intense, was the in-fighting that continued between the Senate and other governmental organs staffed by citizens. The Bürgerschaft jealously guarded its right to administer justice against the Senate’s encroachment. On the court of first instance, the *Niedergericht*, sat a mixed body composed of two members of the Senate and nine citizen judges selected from the Bürgerschaft. Although the Senate never openly ignored or slighted the authority of the *Niedergericht*, the line separating its jurisdiction from that of the superior court (the *Obergericht*, identical in membership with the Senate) remained less unambiguously drawn than the Bürgerschaft felt proper. The Senate frequently used dubious administrative expedients to maneuver around the *Niedergericht*. During the course of the eighteenth century, the number of cases the *Niedergericht* heard shrank perceptibly. With that decline, however, the “vigor and pugnacity” of the court increased, as its members strove to ensure that the Senate acknowledge and respect their rights and prerogatives. Those who protested, however, did not take to the streets as their seventeenth-century forebears had done; they chose different fora for airing their grievances. The *Niedergericht*’s Secret Protocol registered repeated complaints over infringements of its authority. The citizen-judges

¹⁴⁹ Willi Bredel, *Unter Türmen und Masten: Geschichte einer Stadt in Geschichten* (Berlin [GDR]: Aufbau, 1968); Otto Rüdiger, “Bönnhasen und Handwerksgesellen,” in Theodor Schrader (ed.), *Hamburg vor 200 Jahren: Gesammelte Vorträge* (Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem, 1892), 239–51. A series of articles in Jörg Berlin (ed.), *Das andere Hamburg: Freiheitliche und demokratische Bestrebungen in der Hansestadt seit dem Spätmittelalter* (Hamburg: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1981), and especially Susanne Petersen, “‘Heck ock dahl legt’ August 1791: ‘Generalstreik’ in Hamburg,” 36–47, argues for a more political interpretation. Similarly, and much earlier, so, too, did Walter Grab, *Demokratische Strömungen in Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein zur Zeit der ersten französischen Republik* (Hamburg: Christians, 1968). Johann Arnold Gunther, who was a major figure in enlightened and reform-minded circles in Hamburg, and a member of the Senate after 1792, voiced his reservations about the discontent embodied in the “uprisings” of 1791: *Müssen die Zünfte abgeschafft werden, nebst einer wahren Darstellung der neuen Unruhen in Hamburg* (Hamburg, September 1791) and *Ueber den Aufstand der Handwerksleute zu Hamburg im August 1791; nebst einigen Reflexionen über Zunftgeist und Zunftzucht: Aus dem Journal von und für Deutschland* [8, no. 7] (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: n.p., 1792).

of the *Niedergericht* considered their position “a civic office of the greatest importance and political significance.” The *Niedergericht* served, at least in its members’ eyes, as a “bulwark of civic tradition” and citizens apparently regarded it as one of the city’s “most important republican institutions.” Thus the eighteenth-century experiences of the *Niedergericht* offer multiple examples of how citizens safeguarded time-honored legal forms as the embodiments of traditional freedoms. Their efforts represented a recasting, or perhaps a spatial resituating, of earlier concerns about the defense of civic liberties. Although the rough-and-tumble battles of the seventeenth century had passed, struggles over political participation remained very much alive.¹⁵⁰

Finally, in the mid and late eighteenth century an indigenous reform movement addressed a number of perceived administrative deficiencies. It promoted a range of improvements and raised calls for changes in Hamburg’s constitutional make-up. Some reforms (especially in the realm of justice) came into being during the French occupation. Later, after liberation, many changes remained, but, tellingly, the post-war settlement reinstated the old constitution, which underwent no significant modifications until 1860. The republicanism that had been born in 1712 was replanted and remained viable until a different set of civil and political disturbances, including a massively destructive fire in 1842, uprooted it. Revolutionary agitations in 1848 eventually resulted in the constitution of 28 September 1860 that created a representative government, albeit one with a quite limited franchise. In theory, even in the late nineteenth century, the division of power between Senate and *Bürgerschaft* as set forth in 1712 continued in force. Other traditions and institutions, such as the parish-based collegial bodies, however, vanished from the political scene. The *Bürgerschaft* became a legislative body even if most representatives enjoyed only a weak position vis-à-vis later generations of old Hamburg *Senatorenfamilie* and the new plutocrats. These very same “fractions of capital” – to employ Richard Evans’s fortuitous term – held on to power tenaciously well into the

¹⁵⁰ The most important and informed work on the *Niedergericht* is that of Daniel Heinrich Jacobi, *Geschichte des Hamburger Niedergerichts* (Hamburg: Nolte, 1866). Few records of the *Niedergericht* are still extant – and the Secret Protocol is not one of them – and others are barred from use because of mold. Jacobi had full access to them, however, in the middle of the nineteenth century. We should read Jacobi’s account with a bit of skepticism because he was a member of this court in its later incarnation. See Jacobi, *Niedergericht*, 47–76, 110–11, 135, 139–45. Still, other evidence supports Jacobi’s general evaluation. See Theodor Hasche, *Kurze Darstellung des Verfahrens im Hamburgischen Nieder-Gerichte* (Hamburg: Nestler, 1802); Westphalen, *Verfassung*, 1: 33–55; Klefeker, 5: 261–568; Nicolaus Schuback, “Versuch Einer Systematischen Abhandlung vom Richterlichen Ampt in Hamburg . . .” (c.1747), in SUB, *Handschriftensammlung*, Cod. Hans. II, 139, 2, fols. 201–81. For examples of the numerous incidents in the eighteenth century that occasioned jurisdictional disputes between Senate and *Niedergericht*, see StAHbg, Senate Cl. VII Lit. Ma Nr. 5 vol. 4b4, 4f3, 4f5–6, 4f8–11, 4f15, 4h, 4l.

twentieth century, still brandishing, whenever possible or expedient, the now somewhat tattered flag of Hanseatic republicanism.¹⁵¹

Conclusions

Discord formed a normal part of political life in the merchant republics even if harmony and peace remained highly valued ideals. While the turmoil prevalent in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is perhaps more striking and is certainly more studied, these “restless cities” had by no means quieted entirely fifty or even a hundred and fifty years later.¹⁵² Street violence rose and abated, or was repressed, but it was not the only expression of discontent. Intra-elite conflicts, constitutional struggles, discontent over scandalous behavior in office, and corruption patterned political life in violent and non-violent ways. It was, however, hardly only in urban republics where citizens and subjects worried about the effects of corrupt practices, office-jobbing, misuse of funds, and sheer impropriety in office. Evidence shows that in monarchies as well corruption motivated dissent and even uprisings, tumbled favorites, and fashioned political discourses.¹⁵³ The Dutch stadhouders, and especially Willem III, suffered from charges of rampant corruption in their handling of posts, offices, and honors, for example.¹⁵⁴

However, because republics esteemed and preserved the sense – or the fiction if one wills – that morals *ought* to be purer in republics than elsewhere, corruption possessed far greater ability to disturb civic peace and evoke outrage. Here the history of the merchant republics over the course of the long eighteenth century converges nicely with older and more recent debates about republican virtue. Thus, in the merchant republics as much as elsewhere, one finds a marked overlap between corruption and political life more generally. Corruption was an evocative, and even explosive, political discourse because of that linkage and because it formed part of the more universal urban struggle between oligarches and citizens, between patricians and *popolani*, and between central territories and cities seeking to preserve their traditional rights and liberties.

¹⁵¹ *Hamburg*, 477–85; Hans Nirrnhelm and Heinrich Reincke, *Die hamburgische Verfassungsfrage im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgischen Geschichte, 1923); Katherine Aaslestad, “Old Visions and New Vices: Civic Republicanism in Hamburg’s Print Culture, 1790–1810,” in Hohendahl, *Patriotism*, 143–65; Peter-Uwe Hohendahl (ed.), *Patriotism, Cosmopolitanism, and National Culture: Public Culture in Hamburg 1700–1933* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 143–65; Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years, 1830–1910* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 28–49.

¹⁵² Thomas Lau, *Unruhige Städte: Die Stadt, das Reich und die Reichsstadt (1648–1806)* (Berlin: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2011).

¹⁵³ See, for example, Peck, *Court Patronage*; Janssen, *Princely Power*; Kettering, *Patrons*; and Doyle, *Venality*, to name just a handful of studies that focus on princely or monarchical systems.

¹⁵⁴ Israel, 810, 826–7, 963; Troost, *William III*, 114–17.

In each of our three merchant republics, corruption frequently served as an accelerant in political conflagrations. Charges of corruption fed political infighting and could be employed to remove a political opponent from the scene. Bonds of patronage, clientage, and family joined men and women together in each city but also set them against each other. At times, corruption seemed only to discommode the lives of powerful men as they engaged in intra-elite conflicts, as each group, lineage, or family strove to protect and advance its own interests. At other times, and in other places, it caused major disturbances that threatened the very integrity and the life of the republic itself, as competing ideas of proper political conduct, the just allocation of political power, and the right to share in the benefits of offices and posts, or to profit from the spoils, violently clashed.

Merchants and republicans

When people in the merchant republics thought of themselves and their position in their world, they molded themselves, often explicitly, on particular types, or at the very least held up these models to others as ideals. They took as their paragon the merchant, who was inevitably also a republican. Obviously, of course, not every inhabitant of Amsterdam, Antwerp, or Hamburg made his or her living from commerce or had tight connections to the commercial and mercantile worlds. Nonetheless, each city clung to a mercantile identity even if active trade had receded into the background as when, for example, regents became a permanent governing class, and when other forms of economic life, like merchant banking or manufacturing, assumed greater prominence. A late eighteenth-century commentator in Amsterdam, for example, argued that a regent must “understand trade from top to bottom” even if “he was not a merchant [himself].” In Antwerp where, as we have seen, nobles and jurists dominated the magistracy, merchants continued to be prized for their horse-sense, commercial expertise, and financial acumen.¹ Thus, while it seems fully justified to speak of the persistence of a merchant identity, what that actually meant was not always immediately obvious.

Identities come in many forms, of course, and most people possess multiple and simultaneous ones. In the context of the early modern world, for example, one was a Lutheran, Catholic, Jewish, or Mennonite, male or female, young or old, choleric or sanguine in temperament, an artisan or pastor, physically

¹ P.V.W.M.D. [Pieter van Woensel], *Vertoog over de opvoeding van een nederlandsche regent* (Amsterdam: A. Borchers, 1781), 17. In an article treating fortunes and social prestige, Karel Degryse described several cities as merchant republics, although he did not use the phrase. Rather, he described them as places “where trade was highly valued,” and that contemporaries counted as the “most important maritime commercial centers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.” These included Antwerp, Nantes, Lyon, Marseille, Seville, Augsburg, Amsterdam, and so on. “Fortuin en sociaal prestige: Enkele beschouwingen over het ‘verraad van de burgerij’ tijdens het Ancien Régime,” *TVSG* 9 (1977): 283–93.

disabled or whole. Just as obviously identities, like social roles, bodies, gender, and sex, can be constructed or fashioned, sometimes consciously, sometimes less so. Some identities are clearly determined for us by biology or strongly shaped by milieu. Groups, too, construct identities for themselves and for others.

In the phrase merchant republic, “merchant” was an *identification* and not necessarily an identity and certainly by no means always an accurate occupational descriptor. In each city, there lived many merchants and many who considered themselves merchants even if they had retired from active trade to become rentiers or had become primarily involved in governing. The bankers-financiers of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg would have easily grouped themselves, and been grouped, with merchants as the designation of merchant banker reflects. Republic and republican were more general and vaguer identifiers but can be found just as often in the rhetoric used in all three cities and by virtually all contemporaries. Most important of all was the easy elision between merchants and republicans; the categories of merchants, good governors, and good citizens slid seamlessly into one another. The frequency and ease with which contemporaries linked the merchant, the magistrate, the defender of urban liberties, and a “true aristocrat” are striking.

The political value of mercantile virtues echoed in a political commentary just as rich in references to republican values. The Hamburger author, Jonas von Heß, explicitly associated merchant states with the idea of freedoms, or “liberties” in eighteenth-century parlance:

In *Hamburg* the superior group is not the nobility, as is usual in other places. The real noble in Hamburg is: a burgher. The highest noble is a member of the Senate or of the various [governing] councils, elected by his fellow citizens. “Real” nobles have never done anything for the city; its manufactories, trade, and shipping made it great . . . Thus in thanks and self-interest Hamburg gives its highest, [indeed] its only distinction to merchants.

This social and political arrangement, in Heß’s view, meant that Hamburg belonged “to that very small handful of states, where each person enjoys unhindered freedom, as long as the exercise of it does not infringe upon civic peace.”² These were the early modern republics of which the merchant republic formed an important subset.

Images and realities

Over the course of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as these cities sought to create, maintain, and strengthen unique identities, the

² Curio quoted in Percy Ernst Schramm, *Hamburg, ein Sonderfall in der Geschichte Deutschlands* (Hamburg: Christians, 1964), 15–16; Jonas Ludwig von Heß, *Topographisch-politisch-historische Beschreibung der Stadt Hamburg* (Hamburg: Bachmann und Gundermann, 1796), 2: 142–3.

merchant republicans tended to define themselves in opposition to what they were not. Most evidently, they were neither subjects nor soldiers. They embodied virtues (and, for that matter, vices) that differed from the world of the court. As free republicans they lived under a just, transparent government. Most of all, burghers were not nobles; thus they should avoid acquiring or aping noble-like qualities and characteristics.³ Although it was true in the merchant republics as in England that “republicanism [there] cannot be reduced to that antimonarchical component which was a negative precondition for the achievement of positive objectives,”⁴ in Amsterdam and Hamburg, rhetoric abounded that condemned monarchies and the nobility of blood. However, the nobility of spirit, the true aristocracy residing in the patrician breast and regent heart, forged the tempered alloy that undergirded their mixed constitutions. This nobility differed entirely from that endowed by four quarterings of blue-blooded ancestry.

As early as the sixteenth century, the charge of acting like a monarch or treating citizens as subjects expressed political opposition and often formed the meat of political dissent. It evoked charges of corruption, triggered outraged expressions of civic discontent, or even provoked violence. In late sixteenth-century Amsterdam, the complaints against Mr. Hendrick Dircksz. described him as “the great Monarch . . . who ruled everything in the city alone and lived like a veritable emperor.”⁵ Citizens of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hamburg likewise resented the high-handed treatment they received from a Senate that increasingly regarded them, they charged, not as colleagues pulling together in government harness but as minions. In 1618, the *Bürgerschaft* boldly confronted the Senate, expressing doubts about the basis of its authority, protesting the imperious and arbitrary way in which the Senate responded to them, and pugnaciously querying “if Hamburg’s constitution were aristocratic or democratic.” At this moment, the *Bürgermeister* Vincent Moeller uttered in the Senate’s defense a classic definition of the mixed constitution; but this formulation failed to satisfy the early seventeenth-century *Bürgerschaft* and the quarrel, as we have seen, escalated into bloodshed.⁶

³ Several essays in Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, vol. 1: *Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) address the “Rejection of Monarchy”: Wyger R. E. Velema, “That a Republic is Better than a Monarchy”: Anti-Monarchism in Early Modern Dutch Political Thought,” 9–26; Martin Dzelzainis, “Anti-Monarchism in English Republicanism,” 27–41; Anna Grzeskowiak-Krwawicz, “Anti-Monarchism in Polish Republicanism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” 43–59; and Jonathan Scott, “Classical Republicanism in Seventeenth-century England and the Netherlands,” 61–81.

⁴ Scott, “Classical Republicanism,” 61. ⁵ Elias-1, 12.

⁶ Moeller quoted in Leonhard Wächter, *Historische Nachlaß*, ed. Carl F. Wurm (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser und Mauke, 1838), 276. Geert Seelig, *Die geschichtliche Entwicklung der hamburgischen Bürgerschaft und die hamburgischen Notabeln* (Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem, 1900), 71.

Antwerp's situation differed markedly, at least on the surface of things. In some ways, therefore, Antwerp represented a variant example without, however, breaking the mold of merchant republic. Like Amsterdam and Hamburg, the city prided itself on its self-government and controlled most internal affairs. Nonetheless, it formed part of a state ruled by the Spanish, then Austrian Habsburgs.⁷ Perhaps more importantly, a significant percentage of its magistrates were themselves nobles. A French traveler to Antwerp in 1791 found "the nobility here very numerous," if one reckoned all those with a "van" in front of their names. He, however, expressed some doubt as to "whether that particle always indicated nobility" and also differentiated somewhat tortuously between the nobility of office and a nobility of blood.⁸ Such a presence of nobles in city government remained unknown in either Amsterdam or Hamburg; in Hamburg accepting a title of nobility disqualified a man for civic office. In Amsterdam, even those regents who owned estates (*heerlijkheden*) and were titled "Heer van" – such as Adrian Pau, Heer *van* Heemstede, or Dirk van Vlamingh *van* Oudshoorn – possessed no rights to sit in the Knights' Chamber and retained a "burgerlijke" lifestyle.⁹

Nonetheless, in Antwerp the observed gap between noble and non-noble (or merchant) proves somewhat misleading. It is true, for example, that in the second half of the eighteenth century (and probably earlier), few Antwepeners founded their fortunes on trade; many became financiers (*coopmanen ter borse*) and then rentiers, a trajectory surely much accelerated by the general breakdown first of the once-rich Spanish trade and the overall economic malaise (while others established fortunes in manufacturing, especially in cloth and sugar refining).¹⁰ Still, the desire for titles of nobility had begun in the seventeenth century or earlier and both the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs made legal provisions for nobles to continue in active trade; a number did so.¹¹ Merchants, nonetheless, remained a presence in the Antwerp magistracy, although generally their political careers began later (at an average age of 51, for example, in the last quarter of the seventeenth century), endured fewer

⁷ On the restricted autonomy of Antwerp, here in financial matters, see Marjolein 't Hart and Michael Limberger, "Staatsmacht en stedelijk autonomie: Het geld van Antwerpen en Amsterdam (1500–1700)," *TVSEG* 3, 3 (2006): 36–72.

⁸ P. N. Anot quoted in Jan-Albert Goris, *Lof van Antwerpen: Hoe reizigers Antwerpen zagen, van de XVIe tot de XXe eeuw* (Brussels: N.V. Standaard-Boekhandel, 1940), 166.

⁹ Nicholas A. Westphalen, *Hamburgs Verfassung und Verwaltung in ihrer allmählichen Entwicklung bis auf die neueste Zeit* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1846), 1: 390–400; Joop de Jong, "De regenten, de Republiek en het aristocratiseringsproces: Een terugblik," in Guido Marnef and René Vermeir (eds.), *Adel en macht: Politiek, cultuur, economie* (Maastricht: Shaker, 2004), 6–8.

¹⁰ Hilde Greefs, "Ondernemers en de genootschappen: Een onderzoek naar het gezelschapsleven te Antwerpen tussen 1796–1830," *BTG* 75 (1992): 3–36.

¹¹ Karel Degryse, *De Antwerpse fortuinen: Kapitaalsaccumulatie, -investering en -rendement te Antwerpen in de 18de eeuw* (Antwerp: Genootschap voor Antwerpse Geschiedenis, 2002; special issue of *BTG*), 29, 85, 189, 191–2.

years, and achieved less distinction than those of the nobles and especially the jurists among them. Merchant members of the magistracy generally traveled only modest career trajectories. Guillaume Mols was 55 when he became schepen, a post he filled a few times until his death in 1703. The government career of Jan Engelgrave who was 60 years old when selected schepen for the first time progressed in a similarly unspectacular manner; he held no other important positions. Admittedly, not all merchants led such lackluster political lives, but most seemed uninterested in involving themselves in politics or only sought selection at the end of an active life to mark their acquired status and not as a means of social ascent. Thus, “men of trade . . . were taken into the magistracy partly because of tradition and partly so they could use their [business] expertise to advise the city in economic matters.”¹²

Consequently, it hardly surprises that the expression of distaste and disdain for the nobility, monarchs, and courts assumed a less shrill tone in Antwerp than in Amsterdam and Hamburg. Yet despite the far more obvious presence of the nobility in Antwerp, contemporary observers, such as the German encyclopedist Johann Zedler, unhesitatingly referred to Antwerp as a merchant city. Clearly, the mercantile spirit by no means lay dormant in Antwerp. The best study of Antwerp fortunes in this period points out that it remained abundantly “clear that the image of the rich Antwerp merchant served as the ideal [to emulate] for every Antwerpener who sought to climb the social ladder.” Likewise, if in a rather understated manner, Antwerpeners voiced their own critiques of nobles. The extremely affluent merchant-financier Jacomo de Pret wrote in 1683 that “we raise our children here to cultivate a certain distaste for the court and [seek] to procure for them a situation in which one follows a traditional system.” De Pret acknowledged that some nobles could maintain “une grande oeconomie” in their lives but regarded these as great exceptions.¹³

The mild, sporadic criticism of nobles found in Antwerp became in Amsterdam and Hamburg strident, prideful rejection, at least rhetorically, of nobility and its attributes. The spectatorial publications of the early and mid eighteenth century developed these themes at length, as did the more overtly political writings of Pieter de la Court in mid seventeenth-century Amsterdam and August Wygand in late seventeenth-century Hamburg. Justus van Effen’s *Dutch Spectator* and the most famous of the German moral weeklies, Hamburg’s *The Patriot*, produced finely sketched portraits of noble vice, monarchical corruption, and republican virtue, often in personified and sometimes brutally satirical forms.¹⁴

¹² Gerda van de Broeck, “De Antwerpse magistraat 1675–1699: Een bijdrage tot de institutionele en sociale geschiedenis” (Licentiaat, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1980), 1: 145, 155, 183 (quote).

¹³ Degryse, *Antwerpse fortuinen*, 181, 182; De Pret quote, 182n7.

¹⁴ Pieter de la Court, *Interest van Holland ofte Gronden van Hollands-Welvaren* (Amsterdam: J. C. Vander Gracht, 1662) and his *Aanwysing der heilsame politike gronden en maximen van de Republike van Holland en West-Vriesland* (Leiden: Hakkens, 1669); Justus van Effen, *De Hollandsche spectator* (6 parts in 3 vols.; Amsterdam: Uytwerf, 1731–5); *Der Patriot* (1724–6).

Although the spectatorial writings tended to be didactic and prescriptive, advancing programs to reform manners and morals, they nonetheless reflect a common mindset and orientation. Obviously, one must be cautious in exploiting these as historical sources. Did the portraits approach reality and were the opinions of the scribal patriots representative of the attitudes of a larger group of citizens and inhabitants? Historians have generally answered these queries negatively, arguing that the spectatorial press cannot provide more than incomplete and distorted answers to complex questions of social, political, and cultural relevance. Naturally, any attempt to read the spectators as transparent reflections of reality is doomed. Nonetheless, in many cases home-grown patriots and spectators were themselves by no means distant from municipal power bases, political and mercantile alike. When they did not actually govern, they often moved in the same social and cultural milieus and most sprang from the same families as those who actually wielded political power.¹⁵

One is struck by the convergence of sentiment on nobles, nobility, and monarchs that characterizes the writings of De la Court, Wygand, Van Effen, and the eponymous patriot but which is also found in more mundane documents such as diaries and correspondence, or official papers. Obviously, for the Dutch and German spectators, based (as so many others) on the English models of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* of Addison and Steele, it hardly surprises that much seems very similar. All portrayed “the good man of the eighteenth century” and his counter-types, all published fictive letters to the editor, all typically deployed an ironic and sardonic language. Each presented the merchant-citizen as the moral and political exemplar; his reverse image or his distorted analog frequently appeared in these pages as a nobleman (or for that matter noblewoman), or noble wannabe who assumed their qualities and, with these, their vices.¹⁶

¹⁵ Hajo Brugmans in his examination of *De Koopman* emphasizes the one-sidedness of the spectators: “In the *Spectator* all the major and minor human sins are brought to light; the *Spectator* wants to improve and thus must focus on bad practices and on evil, deceitful people. About the good [ones], those always . . . in the majority, one learns little or nothing.” “De Koopman: Mercurius als spectator,” *Jaarboek der Vereenighn Amstelodamum* 10 (1912): 129.

¹⁶ *The Spectator* was published between 1711 and 1712 by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. It was often translated, or pirated, in part or whole by northern European writers. By no means all of the opinions represented and subjects treated in the Dutch and German versions track their English prototype perfectly. Emil Umbach, *Die deutschen Moralischen Wochenschriften und der Spectator von Addison und Steele, ihre Beziehungen zu einander und zur deutschen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Strasburg: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1911); Richmond Pugh Bond, *Contemporaries of the Tatler and Spectator* (Los Angeles; William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1954; reprint; New York: Kraus Reprints, 1967); Fritz Rau, *Zur Verbreitung und Nachahmung des Tatler und Spectator* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1980); Wolfgang Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend: Die Aufklärung im Spiegel der deutschen Moralischen Wochenschriften* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1971). I borrowed the phrase “the good man of the eighteenth century” from Charles A. Whittuck, *The “Good Man” of the XVIIIth Century: A Monograph on XVIIIth Century Didactic Literature* (London: G. Allen, 1901).

Neither Amsterdam, nor Antwerp, nor Hamburg produced a large number of rigorous thinkers on politics. One of the best of these was the Dutch economist and cloth-merchant, Pieter de la Court, introduced in [Chapter 3](#), who offered a sharp critique of monarchy and a ringing endorsement of republics. He also drew strong connections between the good of the state of Holland and its commerce. All his observations, unsurprisingly, pertain especially to the province's principal city: Amsterdam.¹⁷ For his part, De la Court warmly advocated a republican government and crafted a program for preserving, or restoring, republicanism in the Dutch Republic. Not incidentally, his arguments worked by attacking monarchical government and, in particular, targeting the stadhouders about whom De la Court had little good to say (with the exception of Willem the Silent, the "Father of His Country").¹⁸ His preface began with the principle that could be taken as the creed of all merchant republics: "Reason teaches me, that Holland's prosperity depends on the flourishing of its *Manufacturies*, its *Fisheries*, its *Businesses*, and its *Shipping*." Every monarch assailed those pillars of the state. Indeed, he continued, "never has a country suffered *such great slavery* as Holland during or under the *Sway and Rule* of the Prince of Orange."¹⁹ An entire section of his work enumerated and analyzed the many benefits reaped since 1650 (when the stadhouder, Willem II, died unexpectedly of smallpox at the age of 24) under the "current free government." Moreover, "the very *Freedom* and well-being of *Subjects* can only exist in Holland under the unfettered power of a *Free Government*."²⁰ Jonathan Israel has described this republicanism as one where "[the] 'common good' in the civic sphere envision[ed] merchants and wage-earners as the backbone of the citizenry."²¹

Justus van Effen, writing seven decades after De la Court, sounded similar tones in projecting his vision of a "respectable burgher"; he was no "intellectual" but a man of sound judgment. "In those things he understands . . . [he] is

¹⁷ Jonathan Israel describes De la Court as "a writer of international significance whose ideas touched every aspect of contemporary political, economic, and cultural life" and as a strong advocate of religious toleration. Israel, 759; further discussion of De la Court and his influence, 759–60, 786–7.

¹⁸ De la Court, *Aanwysing*. On De la Court, see Ivo W. Wildenberg, *Johann & Pieter de la Court* (Amsterdam: Holland universiteits pers, 1986).

¹⁹ "Voorreeden," De la Court, *Aanwysing*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 509, 519. De la Court also pointed out that the return of "true freedom" had freed the population from heavy and unnecessary financial burdens. Of course, the Dutch always paid the highest taxes in Europe, but, as recent scholarship has argued, it seems that they believed that the social and economic goods they received for those taxes were worth the cost, whereas the goods that monarchs provided were not. Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zandenc, "Tax Morale and Citizenship in the Dutch Republic," in Oscar Gelderblom (ed.), *The Political Economy of the Dutch Republic* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 164.

²¹ Jonathan Israel, "Monarchy, Orangism, and Republicanism in the Later Dutch Golden Age," Second Golden Age Lecture, delivered on Thursday 11 March 2004 (Amsterdam: Amsterdams Centrum voor de Studie van de Gouden Eeuw, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2004), 6–7.

not misled by others' opinions." Moreover, "he comprehends trade thoroughly, knows how to deal with people even in the most fraught situations," and follows good advice when he needs it. Van Effen's "good man" was at one time a merchant, a burgher, and of "moderate position," not rich yet well off from the earnings his industry had generated.²² For Van Effen, at the opposing pole was found the noble. He admired no nobility of blood; rather, he preferred a "noblesse commerçante." He wondered, rhetorically, "why nobles make such a deep impression on some dispositions." Was it perhaps "a condition of body, a superiority of spirit, or a gift of reason?" He doubted it. Most nobles, perhaps even all, "deserve not an iota of respect from any reasonable creature."²³

Hamburg's *The Patriot* shared De la Court's and Van Effen's convictions and also wrote extensively on the problems of nobles and monarchy, although far less acrimoniously than De la Court. The problem with the monarchical regime lay not only in its arbitrary and unjust actions but also in the collateral inability to ensure that monarchs adhered to the laws and customs of the polity. This failure jeopardized the "freedom of the individual subject." If *The Patriot* chose to speak in moderate, well-tempered tones, an earlier republican and patriot, August Wygand, launched jeremiads with Old Testament fervor. His 1699 *Manifesto* castigated the oligarchy embodied in Hamburg's Senate for its arrogant pretensions and monarchical vices.²⁴ Moreover, a number of more ephemeral political writings struck with unrestrained vehemence at the same corrupt and corrupting effect of "monarchical ambitions" on the freedoms that characterized Hamburg's civic and political life.²⁵

Monarchy as a type and a reality thus served as a convenient rhetorical whipping-boy and counterpart to how merchant republics defined their own identities, liberties, and governmental forms. Few rejected monarchy totally and the criticism of monarchy, typically and prudently, most often targeted specific examples. With only single exceptions, and generally not until the mid eighteenth century, did direct criticism strike at particular monarchs with their

²² *De Hollandsche spectator*, no. 3 (3 September 1731).

²³ *Ibid.*, no. 54 (2 May 1732); a similar defense and valuation of burghers over those with titles is found in no. 59 (19 May 1732). Eveline Koolhaas-Grosfeld, in a study of dissimulation, refers to Van Effen's thoughts on nobility and "commercial nobility." "Behind the Mask of Civility: Physiognomy and Unmasking in the Early Eighteenth-Century Dutch Republic," in Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekker, and Michael Mascuch (eds.), *Controlling Time and Shaping the Self: Developments in Autobiographical Writing Since the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 253.

²⁴ Levinus Ferdinand de Beaufort, *Verhandeling van de vryheit in den burgerstaet* (Leiden: Samuel Luchtmans; Middelburg: Leendert Bakker, 1737), 103–4; August Wygand, "Die So wohl in gemeinen Kayserliche/ als ihren absonderlichen Statuten und Recessen-mäßigen Rechten umümbstößlich gegeründete Hamburgische Bürgerliche Freyheit Oder Gründliches MANIFEST und Darthuung/ . . . Der gantzten Welt Zur unbetrüglichen Nachricht Ans Licht gegeben/ Von einem Der Ergessenen Hamburgis. Bürgerschaft Aufrichtig zugethanem Stadt-Kinde. Gedruckt/ im August Monat 1699." StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol. A320/24a.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

moral flaws, rather than the monarchical system in its entirety. Not until then did republicans begin to attack monarchs *qua* monarchs, no matter who sat on the throne, although a certain latent anti-monarchical animosity always nested in the feelings of the states party in the Dutch Republic and among some opponents of the Senate in Hamburg. Republicans, of course, extolled the virtues of republics over monarchies. Yet it was the often observed tendency for monarchies to degenerate and for certain monarchs to act cruelly, irresponsibly, and arbitrarily (or all three), that animated the greatest vituperation. Even a dyed-in-the-wool republican like De la Court could say good things about an exceptional man. He warmly praised Willem I's firm opposition to the demands of the Reformed clergy and contrasted him to a far greater tyrant: Philip II. De la Court also pointed out that by the third generation – here he meant the brief but turbulent stadhoudership of Willem II during 1647–50 – the flaws of the ordinary monarchical specimen had manifested themselves; Willem II had not only allied himself politically with the more fundamentalist branch of the Reformed clergy, he had also threatened to use force to suppress Amsterdam's liberties.²⁶

The Patriot, too, distinguished between good and bad monarchs on the basis of the moral qualities they did *not* share with republicans; yet, a criticism of the system itself ran not far beneath the surface. Scholars have usually categorized *The Patriot* as an organ of enlightenment (which it was) and thus have tended to see much of its commentary on monarchy as a plaidoyer for enlightened despotism or enlightened monarchy.²⁷ *The Patriot's* pronouncements on monarchy can indeed be read just that way but they were simultaneously the expression of an urban republicanism that privileged republican over monarchical government as a self-definition and a preferred governmental form. *The Patriot* spent quite a bit of time discussing the qualities, education, and activities of the good monarch or virtuous prince and it is salient how those sterling qualities overlapped with, and reproduced, those of burghers. Moreover, *The Patriot* clearly regarded this paragon as a *rara avis* and symbolically expressed its reservations by placing the iconography of monarchy – crown, scepter, and purple – alongside the symbols of degradation and cruelty: “chains, swords, and most fearsome devices of torture.” Similarly, while a republic “inevitably” rewarded responsible, active burghers with offices and honors, the servants of a monarch, his favorites, and even (or perhaps especially) his honest and diligent officials, could expect little more than to be “willfully used and abused.”²⁸

²⁶ De la Court, *Aanwysing*, “Voorreeden.”

²⁷ See, for example, Wolfgang Martens's commentary on how *Der Patriot* treated monarchy, Martens (ed.), *Der Patriot nach dem Originalausgabe Hamburg 1724–1726 in drei Textbänden und einem Kommentarband kritisch herausgegeben* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969–84), 4: 199.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 73 (24 May 1725); no. 139 (29 August 1726).

The merchant republics generally distinguished between their own aristocracies of merit and character and nobles of blood. Yet oligarches often suffered from the same failings as monarchs. The nobles that peopled the pages of the moral weeklies and the spectatorial publications, like those who lived in the *belles lettres* of the day, as in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and, as more savagely portrayed in Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), "offered [only] exaggerated depictions of the lesser nobility's poverty, ignorance, and pride."²⁹ By the 1720s, the burlesque version of nobility that *The Patriot* and Van Effen projected was already out of date. Nonetheless, it remained a useful rhetorical device for drawing out the differences between nobles and courts on the one hand and citizens and free cities on the other. A comparison of the vision the citizen and his distorted reflection – the noble – had a clear didactic goal: that of defining *Bürgerlichkeit* more precisely as well as offering a personification or exemplar of the virtues of the good citizen.

"Typical" noble displayed characteristics that raised burgher hackles. The overweening pride of the nobility and the nobles' haughty disdain for the good, solid citizenry of merchant republics infuriated Van Effen. "[When] they speak the word *burgher*, they rumple their noses in a distasteful manner." Many "high-born" persons believed that burghers were not much good for anything, although "daily experience" demonstrated the opposite. Nobles, however, expected an immediate, welcoming reception from respectable burgher society even when, or especially when, they had little to recommend them other than their genealogies and quarterings of nobility, as well as a polished exterior and a good deal of bluster.³⁰ These may seem platitudes, but they also expressed a strong set of attitudes that bled into moral and political discourses and affected actions.

If nobles as individuals and members of a group attracted satirical jabs and prompted resentment, court society, too, was viewed as the antithesis of a civic community and the obverse of everything for which merchant republics stood. The court, far from being – or being any longer – the center of the civilizing process (if one ever existed) had become for these authors a den of iniquity, a school for scandal, and the repository of everything false, shallow, and tyrannical. Like most moral weeklies, *The Patriot* turned a decidedly cold shoulder toward life at court: it was immoral; it valued appearance over reality; it engaged in a conspicuous consumption that ruined nobles and their families while sometimes dragging their bourgeois creditors down with them; it was a world of shallow careerists and social climbers. Outward splendor masked inner decay and the setting of the court was inherently insincere and postiche.³¹

²⁹ Jonathan Dewald, *The European Nobility, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 183–84.

³⁰ *De Hollandsche spectator*, no. 54 (2 May 1732).

³¹ Heinrich Sieveking, *Georg Heinrich Sieveking: Lebensbild eines Hamburger Kaufmanns aus der Zeitalter der französischen Revolution* (Berlin: Karl Curtius, 1913), 416; Franklin Kopitzsch,

Symptomatically, court life fed on pretense and its impostures were anathema to a mercantile culture where, at least rhetorically, civic and political life, like business deals, must be transparent. The virtuous merchant was believed honest, hard-working, modest, and too solidly respectable to enter into dicey get-rich-quick schemes. The values of court life proved equally destructive of a political world built (theoretically) on a wide political participation and transparency, openness, and responsibility. Courts pullulated with mercenary officials and place-seekers whereas good burghers shouldered the responsibilities of governing out of a sense of civic duty. Thus in the mid to late seventeenth and even into the early eighteenth century, the image of profligate nobles persisted: they were prodigal in their sexuality, their purse, and their entire habitus. Satire could, therefore, still hit its mark by associating noblemen with ignoble qualities as the title and subject of a pamphlet describing a fictive legal process against three noble brothers – one a drunk, the other a whoremonger, and the third, a gambler – indicates.³² The lack of integrity, the despotic rule, the falsity, the dissimulation, and above all the arrogance that rendered monarchy intolerable to a free commercial people also made suspect those who thrived at court, that is, the nobility. Courts served, in the end, as nothing more than “academies for [training up] liars.”³³

Merchants had not always enjoyed a good reputation either, even in cities built on trade. In France, the re-evaluation of merchants as beneficial to the state began only very late in the seventeenth century. What Amalia Kessler has called a “fundamental reconceptualization of commerce” from being a “public hazard” to a “modern conception of commerce as free private exchange naturally redounding to the civic good” and “the most solid basis of civil society” was an eighteenth-century phenomenon and only then did the worth of commerce and its practitioners rise in public opinion. As “classical republicanism” faded, so, too, flagged the “traditional view that saw merchants as fundamentally untrustworthy morally vacuous creatures.”³⁴ That transformation, of course, happened earlier and struck deeper roots in the merchant republics than in territorial states, like France. The negativity attached to mercantile pursuits never sounded stridently in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, when

Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte der Aufklärung in Hamburg und Altona (2nd enlarged edn.; Hamburg: Verlag Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1990), 204–6; *Der Patriot*, no. 12 (1724); “Mahler der Sitten,” quoted in Martens, *Botschaft*, 351.

³² ‘t Vermaeckelick Proces Van drie Edel-Lieden, zijnde Gebroeders: De eeine ein Dronckaert, De tweede een Hoereerder, de derde een Speler. Met verscheyde Verssen, nevens een Oordeels bedencken (The Hague: Is. Burchoorn, n.d. [1664]).

³³ Heß, *Beschreibung*, 2: 382.

³⁴ Amalia D. Kessler, *A Revolution in Commerce: The Parisian Merchant Court and the Rise of Commercial Society in Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 3. Junko Thérèse Takeda, *Between Crown and Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 4 refers to the bad reputation merchants once had in Marseille.

it sounded at all. Nonetheless, in these cities, too, the needs of commerce and the wishes of merchants did not always align perfectly with political exigencies and the initiatives of governing elites, even when merchants comprised a large percentage of those very governors and magistrates. In Hamburg, for instance, the Chamber of Commerce not infrequently butted heads with the Senate, and in Amsterdam, too, regents and merchants did not always agree, for example, on the value of free trade or protectionism, neutrality or alliance. In Antwerp, the situation remained more ambiguous as the broader political aims of the Habsburgs thwarted many attempts to stimulate commerce or to apply real pressure for the opening of the Scheldt. Obviously, even where commerce was king, politics and economics never blended fluidly.

By the mid seventeenth century, almost everywhere the negative images of merchants were losing their acrimonious edge. The extent to which “bourgeois values” had replaced them, however, remains unclear. Leslie Price has argued that, at least until the late eighteenth century, “culturally, the noble ideal was far from being completely displaced by a new ideology arising from the booming urban economy, and not even in Holland were what might be called bourgeois values totally triumphant.” Jonathan Dewald, however, has taken a rather different stance and one that seems closer to reality and more analytically convincing; he postulates a convergence of styles and aspirations between burghers and nobles.³⁵ In his view, standards of goodness and probity were everywhere the same and the burgher possessed them fully. *The Patriot*’s perfect example – the fictional Pasiteles – embodied and expressed in his public, private, and business lives exactly the qualities of good citizens. He was, of course, a merchant. Although *The Patriot*, writing in the 1720s, generally assumed a less hostile, more conciliatory tone when speaking of foreign customs and ways of thinking than had earlier observers, nonetheless “he” universalized merchant virtues as a sort of Kantian categorical imperative *avant la lettre*.

The reform program of *The Patriot* sought to refine the customs and broaden the outlook of stolid merchants by stressing the need for wider learning and a broader perspective on religion. Pasiteles represented this new ideal. Well-educated not only in things mercantile, he was pious but neither bigoted nor quixotic. Although cosmopolitan and well-traveled, he had disdained the cavalier’s tour. On his journeys, he gathered useful knowledge rather than acquiring “a few foreign oaths and compliments or new gestures and fashions.” He settled back into Hamburg where he became a prominent merchant and, virtually simultaneously, began a political career. He quickly assumed many voluntary

³⁵ J. Leslie Price, “The Dutch Nobility in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in Hamish M. Scott (ed.), *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, vol. 1: *Western Europe* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 103; Dewald, *European Nobility*, 51.

a noble or courtly way of life.” He was, in short, the “unshakeable support of the public good.”³⁶

Pasiteles was, of course, an ideal type, not a real person. Nonetheless, the same rhetoric lauding the overlap of political, merchant, and personal virtues and moralities inherent in the burgher and the merchant reappears in a wide variety of instances and in quite concrete and individual situations; it was deployed in political and economic discourses and situations as well.

The Patriot also counterpointed burghers and urban civic culture with nobles and court society. Most scholars now consider that characterizations of the nobility as *fainéant*, violent, poorly educated, and shallow that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commentators drew so sharply were more in tune with moralists’ wishes than a reflection of reality. In the merchant republics, however, these biased portraits remained useful counter-images for burghers because they assisted in fashioning their own identities. In addition, the actual interactions between nobles and burghers allowed for misunderstandings. Real moments of dispute and trouble still arose, reinforcing the older prejudices, even if those old categories no longer universally held water.

If the stereotypes of “burgher” and “noble” (like those of republic and monarchy) still overlapped more or less well with actualities and personal encounters at the beginning, or even middle, of the seventeenth century, by the mid eighteenth century, both groups had changed and the social and cultural differences between the two were slowly dissipating; yet they never disappeared. They revived with virulence at the end of the century and can be found in the words and events of the French Revolution as well as in the various “convulsions” (*omwentelingen*) that took place in Holland (the Patriot and Batavian movements), in Antwerp (in the sharp and hostile reactions to the reforms of Joseph II and during the Brabant Revolution), and even in Hamburg where the party of those who greeted the coming of the French Revolution was small and limited to an intellectual elite that almost completely divorced itself from its early enthusiasm for the Revolution by 1793.

In fact, the proximity of nobles to burghers in these cities over the course of the long eighteenth century proved much closer than it may first appear. Despite the rhetorical dividing lines both groups employed, the interactions between them became increasingly frequent and complex.³⁷ In Antwerp, of course, many magistrates belonged to the nobility and merchants seem largely

³⁶ *Der Patriot*, no. 155 (20 December 1726); Jürgen Jacobs, *Prosa der Aufklärung: Moralische Wochenschriften – Autobiographie – Satire – Roman, Kommentar zu einer Epoche* (Munich: Winkler, 1976), 47.

³⁷ Walter Demel, “Der europäische Adel vor der Revolution: Sieben Thesen,” in Ronald G. Asch (ed.), *Der europäische Adel im Ancien Régime: Von der Krise der ständischen Monarchien bis zur Revolution (1600–1789)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001), 425.

to have avoided taking up the tasks of governing.³⁸ Numerous “Persons of Distinction” resided in Hamburg, although as Thomas Lediard noted at mid century, “Gentlemen or Nobility they have, properly speaking, none.” These persons of note included “foreign Ministers of which there are many from almost all the Potentates of Europe and the Nobility of the neighbouring Countries . . . for whom this City is a Sort of Fair or Assembly, chiefly in Winter; and many of them have Houses here.”³⁹ At least one observer at the end of the century remarked that social life in Hamburg tended to split into two parts, that of the “rich and well-educated *négoçiants*” and the circle around the *corps diplomatique*; “the two groups did not particularly care for each other.” His judgment, however, suggests a wider gap than actually existed between them.⁴⁰

Nonetheless, barriers remained to prevent an unconstrained or even comfortable interaction of nobles and non-nobles in Hamburg and these were not only ones of personal attraction or hostility; legal strictures divided nobles from citizens. Hamburg’s statutes denied nobles the right to acquire citizenship. Anyone who accepted a title of nobility forfeited citizenship. Although in many parts of Germany commoners eagerly chased ennoblement, such seldom happened in northwestern Germany and even more rarely in Hamburg. Likewise, only a mere handful of intermarriages between Hamburgers and noble families occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An equally small number of Hamburg citizens sought and obtained noble titles in the long period reaching from the sixteenth century through 1806. Admittedly, the number increased slightly after the middle of the eighteenth century; but there were no noble creations at all from 1670 to 1740. As late as 1798, a member of the imperial bureaucracy could still observe that Hamburg merchants disdained titles: “their great wealth makes monetary rewards useless, and in Hamburg it is not usual for bankers and merchants to strive for patents of nobility.”⁴¹ The prominent businessman and philanthropist, Caspar Voght, caused more than just a few eyebrows to lift when he became a baron (*Freiherr*) in 1801. The popular journal, *Hamburg und Altona*, put the best face on the event it

³⁸ Of the seventy-seven men who sat as *schepenen* in the period 1675–99, only seven are identifiable as merchants. Most of these had shorter careers than the non-merchants, tended to take office only relatively late in life (especially as compared to the *schepenen* who had studied law), and were relatively unimportant. Van de Broeck, “Antwerpse Magistraat,” 1: 180.

³⁹ Thomas Lediard (the Elder), *The German Spy. In familiar letters from Munster, Paderborn, Osnabrug, Minden, Bremen, Hamburg, Gluckstadt, Helgoland, Stade, Lubeck, and Rostock. Written by a Gentleman on His Travels to his Friends in England* (London: J. Mechell, 1738), 273.

⁴⁰ Heinrich Sieveking, *Georg Heinrich Sieveking: Lebensbild eines Hamburger Kaufmanns aus dem Zeitalter der französischen Revolution* (Berlin: Karl Curtius, 1913), 416.

⁴¹ Percy Ernst Schramm, “Hamburg und die Adelsfrage (bis 1806),” *ZVHG* 55 (1969): 81–94. Schramm admitted that he may have missed some cases, but felt that the general trend was evident.

could, suggesting that despite his new title “the *Freiherr* von Voght will always remain the admirable free citizen [of an imperial city]” he had been.⁴²

Dutch burghers proved less consistently hostile to titles than Hamburgers, although one must be careful in assessing the exact meaning of nobiliary particles like “de” and “van.” Regent families frequently bought estates and assumed noble or noble-like appellations, as did the seventeenth-century burghmaster, Johan Huydecoper *van Maarsseveen*, or Jacob de Graeff *van Zuid-Polsbroek*, or Gerard Schaep *van Kortenhoef*, among many others. Although the tendency toward what is generally called aristocraticization may have increased among the regents in the eighteenth century (as compared to the seventeenth), these elites nonetheless remained “part of the larger social formation [of the cities] and not a self-contained urban aristocracy.” Moreover, they tended to marry from their own ranks or exogamously to regent families elsewhere but not often – in fact, hardly at all – into the nobility. Thus, a large and economically puissant group of active merchants and, especially, merchant bankers remained commercially critical and socially central throughout the period. Amsterdam’s citizens, even its wealthiest ones, therefore, marched very much in step with a broader European phenomenon. The tendency for those who got rich to seek titles of nobility is not imaginary, but the extent to which such was common practice and to which it represented a “betrayal” of their origins has been frequently exaggerated.⁴³

The situation in Amsterdam thus exhibited a series of complexities and historians have devoted considerable attention to the issue of whether, or not, the regents can be viewed as a kind of urban nobility, divorced from active trade, and monopolistic in government. Price has suggested that something occurred like a “fusion of privileged groups in town and countryside into a more or less homogeneous class of notables by the later eighteenth century,

⁴² Caspar Voght, *Lebensgeschichte* (Hamburg: Alfred Janssen, 1917), 83; Percy Ernst Schramm, *Neun Generationen: Dreihundert Jahre deutscher “Kulturgeschichte” im Lichte der Schicksale einer Hamburger Bürgerfamilie (1648–1948)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963–4), 1: 299.

⁴³ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Fontana Press, 1991 [1987]), 6–7. “[T]he dominance of the regent elite as the virtual representatives of the bourgeoisie as a whole went very largely unchallenged . . . [and] the class that lost out was the nobility.” Price, “Dutch Nobility,” argues that although the “regents have been seen as a sort of aristocracy,” that made them “very like the nobility,” he finds that picture “not entirely convincing.” Certainly the regents were a political elite, “but it is questionable to what extent they ever formed a separate social group” (111). See also de Jong, “De regenten” and J. Leslie Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Politics of Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 51–6, 223. Van Nierop, *Nobility*, 212–19, sees the nobles and regents as equally part of “the administrative elite of the Republic,” but also notes that “[i]f a social group consists of those persons who intermarry, then the nobility and the regent-aristocracy formed two distinct groups.” For the larger argument refuting the argument about “betrayal,” see Degryse, “Fortuin en sociaal prestige.”

who shared similar lifestyles as well as political power.”⁴⁴ Certainly, by the mid to late eighteenth century, many merchants and other substantial burghers felt closed out of government and had come to resent the entrenched monopoly on political power the regents enjoyed. Such was, apparently, less true in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Even if regent families controlled the highest and most lucrative offices for themselves, other political posts within the system benefited a wide range of those in some way allied with regent groups even if not actually part of them. Moreover, when regents found themselves, as they often did, temporarily or more permanently edged out of power, they tended to return to active trade, sometimes as a stopgap measure to be sure, but sometimes permanently. Merchants who moved away from active trade and into banking, even into large-scale international banking, often “never [severed] the tie to the commodities trade.” In the very same years at the middle of the eighteenth century that, for example, the family Hope was deeply involved in massive financial deals, Thomas Hope authored a plan to revive trade and his company shipped large quantities of timber from the Baltic to France. Later in the century, Hope & Co. (Henry Hope), one of the most powerful and well-regarded European banks of the period, engaged in active commodities exchanges.⁴⁵

Despite the legal strictures and despite the rhetoric that separated burghers and nobles and that typed them as virtually different human species, the presence of nobles in Amsterdam and Hamburg was never insignificant, their impact never negligible, and their interaction with the citizenry never slight.⁴⁶ Until the French Revolution scattered *émigrés* throughout the German lands (and many found their way to Hamburg), the majority of nobles in Hamburg either belonged to the diplomatic corps, had been dispatched to the city on military recruitment expeditions, or were the flotsam and jetsam of second and third sons, impecunious title-holders, and adventurers, as well, of course, their *faux* counterparts. Any sealing-off of one social group from the other, however, to the extent it even existed, proved by no means water-tight. Diplomats, especially those long resident in the city, forged ties with their urban political and economic counterparts; that was, after all, part of their job. Formal contacts often firmed into bonds of affection or even marriage and the contacts between nobles and non-nobles grew more frequent and more intense as the eighteenth century wore on. The social circles around the various *corps diplomatiques* always included nobles who spent a good part of the year in these cities, but they also welcomed many army recruiters, pensioned or furloughed officers, and travelers with titles who passed through the city. Charlotte Sophie,

⁴⁴ Price, “Dutch Nobility,” 105. ⁴⁵ Frijhoff/Prak-2, 227–30.

⁴⁶ Moeller quoted in Leonhard Wächter, *Historische Nachlaß*, ed. Carl F. Wurm (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser und Mauke, 1838), 276. Geert Seelig, *Die geschichtliche Entwicklung der Hamburgischen Bürgerschaft und die hamburgischen Notabeln* (Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem, 1900), 71.

Countess von Bentinck, like *salonnières* virtually everywhere, opened a space where nobles and burghers met. Many of Hamburg's most influential citizens, like Caspar Voght, found themselves "embraced wholeheartedly" by the Countess and the *corps diplomatique*. Moreover, the "well-educated *Réfugies*," those of Huguenot background, like the merchants Pierre His, Albert and Peter Ochs, and Pierre Boué, mediated between nobles and men of commerce, creating a mixed society, where each group enjoyed and profited from the society of the others.⁴⁷

It is, therefore, simplistic to postulate a social and cultural situation where some enormous and unscalable obstacle separated the noble's world from that of citizens in any of these cities. The persistence of rhetoric lambasting the slavish, authoritarian, false, and masked world of nobility and courts actually testifies to how worrisome loomed the sense that the glitter of nobility could lure good burghers away from the straight and narrow path of traditional virtue. It just as accurately reflects the sheer fact that the two worlds had grown closer over two centuries and had learned to appreciate one another better, or at least began to assume similar standards of conduct. The relationships described here between burghers and nobles presented variations on a standard European theme that illustrate a development since the sixteenth century of a double-sided penetration. Jonathan Dewald and others have argued for the gradual evolution of "the idea of the gentleman as a social model: that is, a social idea that stressed achievement, ability, and personal appeal, and made lineage merely a pleasing adjunct to these personal qualities." The gentleman served as one of the "alternative models of superiority" available and its attainment depended on education and elegant deportment. This interpretation, according to Dewald, helps us comprehend a society that "was at once aristocratic and fiercely anti-aristocratic." It also explains why moral commentators and the spectators laboriously distinguished between "true nobility" (as in nobility of mind, soul, and actions) open to anyone and the superficial nobility of courts (a model to be avoided). In the same way, of course, they defended the aristocracy of "the best people" – regents, wealthy merchants, educated legalists – as the most proper rulers of their polities. This distinction persisted well into the early nineteenth century.⁴⁸ The lawyer, Protestant canon, and enthusiastic member of enlightened circles in Hamburg, Friedrich Johann Lorenz Meyer, disdained false nobility as much as he valued an aristocracy based on good morals and an enterprising nature. He praised "the aristocracy of a more noble and proper

⁴⁷ Voght, *Lebensgeschichte*, 18–19, 23–7, 29–30, 35–7, 42; Ernst Finder, *Hamburgisches Bürgertum in der Vergangenheit* (Hamburg: Friedrichson, de Gruyter, 1930), 149–55, 383, 393–4.

⁴⁸ *Der Patriot* no. 153 (5 December 1726); Jonathan Dewald, "Comment" at the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Colorado Springs, April 2002 (personal communication to the author); Dewald, *European Nobility*, 51; *Der Patriot* nos. 26 (29 June 1724), 60 (22 February 1725), 77 (21 June 1725), 124 (6 May 1726), 139 (29 August 1726).

kind, that of morals and the higher intellectual pursuits – may that [form] now and forever dominate our society!”⁴⁹

At the same time, it is wrong to imagine that some *ur-burgher* existed in essentially the same immutable form since the late Middle Ages. Categories of citizenship, and the social, economic, and cultural expectations that accompanied them, evolved with broader political, social, and economic alterations. Nor should one naively assume that burghers always agreed on major issues. Much political life in these cities, and much of the tumult that disturbed them, turned on differing ideas of what role citizens should play in governing their polity and on what qualities they should exhibit. Burghers in all three cities, but, as always, perhaps more emphatically in Amsterdam and Hamburg, also changed. In Hamburg, for example, the staid, rigidly orthodox Lutherans and merchants of the seventeenth and even early eighteenth century (if such ever really lived except as patterns of perfection) had considerably modified themselves and their views by the mid to late eighteenth century. A similar shift, provoking much negative commentary, seemed apparent in Amsterdam during the “periwig” era when merchants became rentiers, commercial spirit supposedly flagged, and French customs and language purportedly drove out good Dutch values. In Antwerp, too, active traders were becoming financiers and rentiers “despite ourselves” as the banker and merchant Jacomo de Pret observed in 1732.⁵⁰

Despite striking differences in their economic fortunes and their political clout (neither Antwerp nor Hamburg ever played the weighty political role in Europe that Amsterdam did), all three traveled parallel paths. Some developments produced considerable apprehension in those who worried about declining morals, civic commitment, and patriotism. Money dealing became a stronger part of economic life although, and despite much rhetoric to the contrary, active trade had not died out in any of them by the end of the eighteenth century; it flourished most luxuriantly in Hamburg. The validation of *amour-propre*, the “pursuit of happiness,” and the emphasis on pleasure that hallmarked eighteenth-century life in Europe led to the creation and acceptance

⁴⁹ Friedrich J. L. Meyer, *Skizzen zu einem Gemälde von Hamburg*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Friedrich Hermann Nestler, 1801–2), 1: 127.

⁵⁰ On Hamburg, see Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge*, 178–5, 231–2, 440; Katherine B. Aaslestad, “Old Visions and New Vices: Republicanism and Civic Virtue in Hamburg’s Print Culture, 1790–1800,” in *Patriotism, Cosmopolitanism and National Culture: Public Culture in Hamburg 1700–1933*, ed. Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 143–66. On the “Periwig Era,” see Israel, 959–1018; Karin van Hoof, Marlies Huijzer, and Alja Bronswijk, *De pruikentijd* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 2006). The term was introduced by a nineteenth-century critic, Conrad Busken Huet (1826–86). A huge amount of contemporary commentary deplores the decline of active trade and the values that went with it as the reason for Amsterdam’s economic and political malaise in the eighteenth century. See, for one example, IJsbrand van Hamelsveld, *De zedelijke toestand der Nederlandsche natie op het einde der achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Johannes Allart, 1791). Jacomo de Pret quoted in Degryse, *Antwerpse fortuneën*, 181.

of a more worldly lifestyle and a greater inclination to revel in the joys of the present, and even to assess those amusements as positive goods. Luxury, with all its ambiguities and often disquieting meanings, abounded and was by no means everywhere disdained or viewed as morally corrupting. Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* counts as the most notorious example, but there were many others who acknowledged the positive side of luxury and wrote about it soberly, seriously, and even approvingly.⁵¹

While many moral weeklies, spectatorial publications, and political tracts continued to condemn luxury and often fueled their rhetoric until it reached fever pitch, leisure and pleasure had long become part of the lifestyle of the good and moral burgher, a way of life that no longer inevitably contravened civic commitment or eroded republican virtues. Lifestyles adapted as well. Houses became larger, more comfortable. Coaches rolled through once-quiet city streets and formed favored targets of moralistic condemnation. Clothing, too, became more varied and extravagant. Merchants' sons no longer found themselves inevitably destined for dark counting-houses; more studied at universities and many more read law than theology or medicine.

No doubt exists that by the eighteenth century many active traders had become rentiers. Yet they did not necessarily abandon their merchant mentalities entirely. Even when, as in Antwerp, active traders tended not to participate in city government directly (or at least not until older), nonetheless "they, too, recognized the benefits of having friends or family members in the magistracy and it often happened that a merchant planned a political [or administrative] career for at least *one* of his sons." In Hamburg, trading families often quite deliberately placed one son in business and another in law, thus making each eligible for office. While everyone still prized mercantile skills, acquiring them was no longer the sole aim of education or the only mark of useful knowledge.⁵²

Thus, more and more burghers, even those who never removed themselves from active business, began to build villas outside city gates, lay out exquisite gardens, adhere to new rules for raising their children, and spend more time at table, indulging in the fashionable new beverages of coffee, tea, and chocolate. They frequented places where they often met nobles, real and fake, and

⁵¹ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Public Benefits* (London: J. Roberts, 1714). For contemporary commentary on the topic, Friedrich J. L. Meyer (ed.), *Fragmente, über Luxus, Bürger-Tugend und Bürger-Wohl, für hamburgische Bürger, die das Gute wollen und können! am 17ten November 1791 in der Gesellschaft zu Beförderung der Künste und nützlichen Gewerbe gelesen von Georg Heinrich Sieveking, mit Beiträgen und Bemerkungen von zwei seiner Freunde [J. M. Hudtwalcker und J. A. Günther]* (Hamburg: Carl Ernst Bohn, 1797).

⁵² "[P]leasure came into its own in the eighteenth century." Sensual pleasures came to be viewed as "legitimate, fulfilling and to be encouraged." Roy Porter, "Introduction," Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (eds.), *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 1–2. But see the biting commentary on "Kutscherluxus" in *Der Patriot* 16 (20 April 1724). Degryse, *Antwerpse fortuinen*, 182–3; Mary Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers: Hamburg, 1712–1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 21–2.

encountered, or even sought out, a demimonde of card-sharks, courtesans, and scoundrels.⁵³

Nonetheless, if burghers had changed, so, too, had the nobility. Although it may appear counterintuitive, nobles proved to be the most adaptable early modern social group and not the most rigidified. Norbert Elias's influential analysis of the "civilizing process" and his discussion of sociogenesis began with the domestication of a warrior class – the feudal nobility – and its transformation into a courtly and service nobility. By the eighteenth century, that process had reached fruition and "educational shortcomings were, at the very least, a growing embarrassment" for any noble.⁵⁴ In Antwerp, for example, a law degree provided the most important prerequisite for both nobles and non-nobles to enter the magistracy. Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in virtually all European countries, but most obviously in western Europe, the nobility had become better educated, more economically savvy, and, in their careers and to a large extent their lifestyles as well, more like the merchants and bureaucrats they had once disdained.⁵⁵

Moralists and the spectators differentiated, of course, as we have seen, between true nobility – of mind, character, conduct, and attitude – and a false nobility that derived from nothing more than lineage. Nobles who exhibited the first set of qualities – those who corresponded most closely to ideals of burgher virtues – deserved respect and admiration. Most offensive to burghers was the effeminate, flighty, arrogant court-noble, although the greatest scorn was poured not on these but on burghers who imitated their customs and their extravagances; commentators excoriated those who admired nobility's not-so-admirable qualities. The young "Herr von Frantzenarr" (French-fool) enjoyed the breathless (and worthless) adoration of "Frau Ventose" (Madame Windy, Madame Flatulent) for his surface polish. *The Patriot*, however, saw only an aping of customs that contact with "a totally corrupted country" (read: France), and "association with fool-headed people" at court, had created. Despite his travels, Frantzenarr had acquired no real command of language, but merely peppered his babblings with "a thousand PAR DIEU and MA FOIS." He had become fully superficial: "He thought more about the cut of his clothes than [the state of] his heart and his soul. A wig, an embroidered coat, a well-cut pocket, all counted more with him than true wisdom." Instead of a "free German," he had become "a slave to foreign passions."⁵⁶

⁵³ Mary Lindemann, *Liaisons dangereuses: Sex, Law, and Diplomacy in the Age of Frederick the Great* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

⁵⁴ Jerzy Lukowski, *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 57.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 57; Dewald, *European Nobility*, 151–5.

⁵⁶ No. 41 (11 October 1724). *Der Patriot* liked this theme and returned to it several times. Besides "Frantznarr," there was also the "Kaufmannsdiener" named Jean de Crane (Johann Crane) whose clothes and demeanor aped his betters. There was also the quite hilarious fictive letter from a Frenchified German addressed to "Monsieur Le Patriote!" and filled with Frenchisms

Frenchification formed, of course, the much deprecated cultural bane for eighteenth-century Dutch, Flemish, and German burghers. Dutch rhetoric assumed the strongest disapproving tone and one that has found considerable resonance in historical scholarship. By the 1790s, and especially after the debacle of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–4), when Dutch decline seemed as painfully self-evident as it was inexorable, numerous writers identified aristocratization and Frenchification as the underlying causes of Dutch malaise. They confidently attributed both to a noxious tendency to mimic nobility. IJsbrand van Hamelsveld, writing in the century's closing decade, painted an ominous picture of moral enervation and prescribed religious tonics. That was hardly surprising in a theologian and a popular preacher like Hamelsveld. However, his vision of moral disease also (again, perhaps not surprisingly) focused on the ways in which the regents had come to resemble a nobility "such as one finds represented in all monarchical governments." He attacked luxurious lifestyles that, in his opinion, had corrupted good burghers at all levels, if most obviously the regents.⁵⁷

The criticisms of increasing luxury could be found already at the middle of the seventeenth century; it crescendoed over the next half century. In 1774, for example, the physician and author, Simon Stijl, examined the "demise of ancient and current republics," including that of Holland and, among other flaws, blamed French customs; the evil habits spawned by *galanterie* and pretense that Dutch burghers had borrowed from noble/monarchical systems poisoned good republicans.⁵⁸

The whole question of decline, decay, and stagnation, or of relative prosperity, in Amsterdam (and throughout the Dutch Republic) is, as we have seen, a complex one. The somber picture eighteenth-century observers painted and that subsequent historical treatments have often incorporated in its entirety has been considerably modified over the last several decades. Modern treatments argue, for instance, that the moral decay of Amsterdam's regents, their retreat from active trade, and their fondness for conspicuous consumption simply did not exist, or at least had not garroted Dutch prosperity. Throughout the seventeenth century, wealth remained very solid and did not express itself in luxury, or rather not in conspicuous consumption of a frivolous or extravagant kind. Rather, and strikingly, "the Amsterdam aristocracy had for a long time . . . known how to avoid the general evil of degeneration."⁵⁹

in place of perfectly good German words: "bibliotheque" for "Bibliothek"; "soudirs" for "Mahlzeiten"; "heures d'amusement" for "Freizeit"; and the half-french, half-German, "agregablester." *Ibid.*, no. 111 (14 February 1726).

⁵⁷ Hamelsveld, *Zedelijke toestand*, 477, 535.

⁵⁸ Simon Stijl, *De opkomst en bloei van de republiek der Vereenigde Nederlanden: Voorafgegaan door eene verhandeling over de opkomst en de ondergang van oude en hedendaagsche republieken* (Amsterdam: Petrus Conradi; Harlingen: F. van der Plaats & junior, 1774; 2nd edn.; Amsterdam: Petrus Conradi, 1778).

⁵⁹ Brugmans, 4: 624–5.

There is, thus, no reason to accept the simple explanation that was born in the late seventeenth century, matured in the eighteenth, and then cherished by several generations of scholars since then that somehow “moral decay” explained economic troubles. Of course, scholars have often poooh-pooohed the idea of moral decay on a religious plane, but accepted a similar explanation in describing the tendency for regents to withdraw from active trade. Very similar moralistic hand-wringing existed in Hamburg in the eighteenth century even when commerce and banking flourished and the city prospered as never before.

Moreover, a certain rough-and-ready cosmopolitanism that existed in all three cities can be attributed not only, or perhaps even mostly, to the gradual rise of enlightened thought on toleration, for example, but to the merchants’ familiarity with other places and customs that formed part of their business lives. Admittedly, it seems that a willingness to accept difference – in religion, origins, or behavior – was probably not all that prevalent. In the 1720s, for example, *The Patriot* still felt it necessary to point out “one must be willing to accept the customs of other peoples.” The very next sentence, however, insisted that the sensible burgher did not saddle his Fatherland or equip himself with “foreign wisdoms without subjecting them to rigorous scrutiny.” One did not assume new habits for fashion’s sake, because such would constitute a form of bondage (*Knechtschaft*) comparable to that holding the subjects of a monarch in thrall.⁶⁰

The condemnation of the fashionable world that rang through Pieter de la Court’s political commentaries and that echoed even more loudly in the work of Hamelsveld at the end of the century also characterized *The Patriot*. In his criticism of “high-living,” Hamelsveld took aim at the whole concept of the “Bon Ton” and linked its flaws and vices with French customs.

The so-called *Bon Ton*, a [foreign] intruder and the corrupter of good morals . . . prescribes turning the day into night and overturns all regularity and order [in life]. The mornings, when most still remain asleep, is wasted by the rest, and especially by the *ladies*, with their *dejeunée* and *toilet*, the afternoon by the *dinée*, and the evening with an *opera*, *komedie*, *assemblee*, *concert* or *bal* that reaches well into the wee hours.

A godless, loose-living Bon Tonism immediately evoked France but nobility of blood also took the blame for, among a long laundry list of woes, the corrosion of good burgher values and, more expansively, the demise of Dutch prosperity. Noble-like habits bore equal responsibility for a newly fashionable lack of marital fidelity and a general disrespect for the sanctity of the wedded state in those patrician families that had assumed noble customs, customs which, it was charged, also included sodomy and love between women.⁶¹ *The Patriot* had

⁶⁰ *Der Patriot*, no. 123 (19 May 1726).

⁶¹ Hamelsveld, *Zedelijke toestand*, 478, 480; Myriam Everard, *Ziel en zinnen: Over liefde en lust tussen vrouwen in de tweede helft van de achttiende eeuw* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1994), 87–8, 87n16; Theo van der Meer, *Sodoms zaad in Nederland: Het ontstaan van homoseksualiteit in de vroegmoderne tijd* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1995); Theo van der Meer,

said much the same thing some seventy years earlier. The good Pasiteles was by no means a sour killjoy; he, too, enjoyed good meals, animated conversation, and entertainment, but he refused to allow his daughters to engage in “French nattering” and nothing of “*assemblées*, balls, galas, and pleasure-days is to be found written in his civic dictionary.”⁶²

The resentment at the arrogance of nobles who looked down on the honest burgher, honest merchant, and, especially, the chaste burgher woman, found expression in scathing parodies. *The Patriot* pilloried “Fräulein Wilhelmine von N.” for raging because her young nephew has decided to marry the modest, well-brought-up, and pure-minded burgher-daughter, Araminthe. His elder cousin, the fictive spokesman for *The Patriot*, counsels him to ignore N.’s anger built as it was on blind prejudice.⁶³

Satire struck hardest perhaps at those whose heads were turned by the thought of a title. *The Fate of Beauty, or, the Fall of Vanity* told the fictitious but didactically useful tale of the daughter of an eminent Amsterdam citizen and merchant, courted by a number of local suitors. She, however, considers their attentions “only as homages due to merit . . . insomuch that according to her own opinion, there was not one in all that metropolis worthy of her esteem, if his wit and other rare qualities were not accompanied with the title of Marquis”; she spurned them all. To teach her a much needed lesson, the suitors banded together and hire a chimney-sweep “a native of France, who was naturally of a good countenance, bold, and of a jovial and enterprising humour, one who desired nothing more than to get money, and to spend his days at ease.” To win her hand, “he had [only to] . . . personate the quality of a Marquis, and order his servants to give him the suitable title on all occasions.” When the truth comes out, her consternation is great but the end happy; she falls in love with her chimney sweep and they made a fine couple.⁶⁴ It is a risible story but demonstrates the expectations found on both sides of the noble/burgher split. It also indicates just how easy such impersonations were to bring off.

Relationships between nobles and burghers remained fraught with uncertainties, ambiguities, misunderstandings, and, frequently, dislike or outright hatred. Nobles, courts, and monarchs flowed together in the minds of burghers and were often viewed as equally dangerous. Bad princes (and most were deemed bad) maltreated their subjects and thus formed the obvious counter-example to the good government a republic provided. Moreover, some noble groups continued to distance themselves from burghers and this was not always,

“Tribades on Trial: Female Same-Sex Offenders in Late Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990/91): 424–45.

⁶² *Der Patriot*, no. 155 (20 December 1726). ⁶³ *Ibid.*, no. 30 (27 July 1724).

⁶⁴ *The Fate of Beauty, or, the Fall of Vanity; being the History of the Unfortunate Lancashire Lass, Anna Brown, of Prescott, in the said County . . . To which is Added, An Adventure of an Agreeable Turn, which happened to one of the Richest Merchant’s Daughter, At Amsterdam in Holland* (London: Printed for Andrew Hambleton, 1789).

as Walter Demel observes, mere snobbism. Contempt ran the other way, too: burghers scorned nobles, or at least many of them, and they were often frustrated by bumping against a glass ceiling of restricted opportunities (most pronounced, of course, in the military).⁶⁵ Especially in the realm of sexual conduct, the conflict was neither economic nor social but rather cultural. These conflicts and expectations crossed with an understanding of what a burgher identity was as well as with ideas of how life in one political unit – a republic – differed, or should differ from that in a monarchy. Nowhere was this situation more pronounced, problem-laden, and revealing than in merchant republics like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. And if genuine nobles produced a whole set of problems, their *faux* counterparts created even greater difficulties and evoked more misgivings. Noble pretenders were common features in all three cities, finding expression in real life situations, moral commentary, and literature.

Imposters, faux nobles, and crooks

The phenomenon of noble imposture existed throughout Europe and not only in merchant republics. Casanova's memoirs overflow with stories of scoundrels in silk; he encountered them everywhere. One main trope in this extensive literature is that courts and their denizens proved particularly susceptible to the blandishments of pretenders and fakes such as goldmakers and other frauds. Courts thrived on dissemblance and masking; vices antithetical to the openness and transparency burgher morality demanded. That this model often did not correspond to reality, that burghers could be as corrupt and false as courtly lords and ladies, hardly affected the rhetoric or even dampened the strength of emotion. Imposture presented a series of problems that crossed and mixed with political, economic, social, moral, and sexual worlds. Imposters, by definition, assumed identities that were not theirs and thus imperiled the political, moral, and economic foundations of the burgher republics. Particularly in business dealings, as discussed in [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#), seeming to be, rather than being, threw up a thicket of nettlesome problems in the faster moving, less knowable economy of the long eighteenth century. These problems bore deeper political, as well as profound and profoundly disturbing cultural, implications in the merchant republics.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Demel, "Europäische Adel," 428.

⁶⁶ *Der Patriot*, no. 120 (13 December 1725). Once again, Casanova proves a good witness; he relates how he won the friendship of the duke of Courland by promising to provide him with an invisible ink. Casanova, *History*, 10: 90. Of course, such projects and projectors also formed part of early modern science and industry as, for instance, in the development of a porcelain industry or in smelting. The interests of courts and monarchs, therefore, could be as strongly economic as fantastical. Bruce T. Moran, *The Alchemical World of the German Court: Occult Philosophy and Chemical Medicine in the Circle of Moritz of Hessen, 1572–1632* (Stuttgart:

The recent historical interest in self-fashioning dovetails rather neatly with an older fascination in shape-shifters, like Casanova, who assumed many identities in their lifetimes. Casanova is the most familiar example if for no other reason than for the impact his memoirs have had as literature. By birth a Venetian, this son of an actor took on many roles: a cleric in minor orders, writer, soldier, spy, diplomat, and librarian, as well as an adventurer, a libertine, and an imposter. If Casanova is the best-known chameleon, he hardly stands alone. Imposters and adventurers crowded the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social and economic worlds and their ambitions and actions varied greatly. Pretending to nobility was a frequent ploy and a particularly meaningful, if also disquieting, imposture in politics like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg.

Imposture itself is an ill-defined category and it is not always easy to determine where deliberate imposture stopped and an attempt to construct a new identity or to assume one permanently began. For example, in the late seventeenth century, the *sieur* Louis de la Pivadière, after returning home from the Nine Years War (1688–97), abandoned his title and married an innkeeper's daughter. The chevalier d'Eon (1728–1810), who was deeply involved in the secret diplomacy of the eighteenth century, was more exotic and more inventive; he dressed as a woman pretending to dress as a man. Giuseppe Balsamo (1743–95), styling himself Alessandro, count di Cagliostro, moved in the fashionable high society of Warsaw and Paris as a magician, seller of rejuvenating elixirs, and magnetic healer. John Law (1672–1729), famous for his financial schemes during the French Regency and the father of the first central bank in France, was a shadowy, obscure figure in his early years. Law's spectacular successes and his equally spectacular failures indicate why imposture formed an economic and business problem for the merchant republics in an era where merchant banking, high finance, and risky monetary gambling combined.⁶⁷

For each of these extremely well-known, even notorious, cases thousands of others existed who were less successful, less enterprising, or even laughable, yet equally familiar. Few illustrate better the combination of genius and deceit

Steiner, 1991); Tara Nummedal, *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁶⁷ The best source on Casanova is his memoirs: *History of My Life*, trans. and ed. William R. Trask (12 parts in 6 vols.; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). Modern works on famous (or infamous) imposters include Jeffrey Ravel, *The Would-Be Commoner: A Tale of Deception, Murder, and Justice in Seventeenth-Century France* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008); Gary Kates, *Monsieur d'Eon is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Denyse Dalbian, *Le Comte de Cagliostro* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1983); Klaus H. Kiefer (ed.), *Cagliostro: Dokumente zu Aufklärung und Okkultismus* (Munich: Beck, 1991); Jean Villiers, *Cagliostro: Le Prophète de la Révolution* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1988). John Law, too, has often been fitted into this category, although others have valued his financial acumen. See Lawrence Lande, *The Rise and Fall of John Law, 1716–1720* (Montreal: Lawrence Lande Foundation for Canadian Historical Research, 1982); Janet Gleeson, *Millionaire: The Philanderer, Gambler, and Duelist Who Invented Modern Finance* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

than John Law or, on a smaller scale, the false prince of Albania, Stiépan Annibale, whose daring economic exploits, or rather, whose economic scheming, threatened to rupture diplomatic relations between Amsterdam and Venice. Their scams played out on a plane beneath that of a Casanova or, for that matter, Law, and yet their stories, too, could be mesmerizing and their audacity breathtaking. The tale of the counterfeit “Prince of Albania,” Stiépan Annibale, offers a perfect illustration. Rather than a fake noble, he was a noble fraud who claimed splendidly exaggerated and outlandish titles, calling himself, for instance, the Dynast of the High Mountains of Albania. Perhaps his most outrageous, or daring, imposture was that of the then recently deceased Tsar Peter III.⁶⁸ Similarly, Baron Theodor von Neuhoff, the quite legitimate son of a noble if undistinguished Westphalian family, ruled very briefly as the supposed king of Corsica in 1736. Like many fake princes, dukes, counts, and gentlemen, he had trouble financing his lifestyle. His many creditors in Amsterdam pursued him fiercely. In his day, he became part of the literary and imaginative world; an opera based on his time in Venice was performed in Vienna in 1784. His deeds, like those of other adventurers and imposters, continue to captivate and a novel loosely recounting his life-story appeared with a major German press in 2001.⁶⁹

For every larger-than-life imposter and adventurer on the scale of a Cagliostro or a Neuhof, scores of lilliputian ones plotted on a smaller scale, garnered less public attention, and excited interest only briefly or locally. In sum, they were extremely frequent. They did not, of course, only flock to cities like Amsterdam, Antwerp, or Hamburg, but their very presence there, and their actions, raised important and vexing issues of credibility and identity. Imposters proved, therefore, never mere curiosities even when, as often

⁶⁸ Roland Mortier, *Le “Prince d’Albanie”: Un aventurier au Siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001); Eduard van Biema, “Stiépan Annibale, Prince d’Albanie: Un aventurier au XVIIIe après des documents inédits des Archives d’Amsterdam,” *Nouvelle revue* 20, no. 114 (1898): 498–518, no. 115 (1898): 88–107; Eco O. G. Haitsma Mulier, “De affaire Zannovich: Amsterdams-Venetiaanse betrekkingen aan het einde van de achttiende eeuw,” *Amstelodamum* 72 (1980): 85–119. Alexandre Stroeve discusses Annibale extensively in his *Les aventuriers des Lumières* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997); on his literary production, *ibid.*, 83–5, 92, 286–9, 294–5. Zannovich wrote a great deal, see, for example, *Oeuvres choisies du princ Castriotto d’Albanie* (n.d., n.p., 1782).

⁶⁹ *Het leven en daaden van den alom beruchte Theodorus Antonius, Baron van Nieuwhof, verkoore koning van Corsica . . .* (Amsterdam: Zacharias Romberg, 1737), originally published in German; *Der träumende Theodor, oder vollkommene Abschilderung des mit Glück und Unglück streitenden Corsischen Königs, Baron Theodor Anthons von Neuhoff, und seines vermeinten Königreichs, der rebellischen Insel Corsica* (Frankfurt am Main: n.p., 1745v); Antoine-Marie Grazani, *Le Roi Theodore* (Paris: Tallandier, 2005); an opera by Giovanni Paisiello, “Il Re Teodoro in Venezia” (1784); Michael Kellberg, *Der König von Korsika* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001). For a more recent historical work, see Michel Vergé-Franceschi, “Un aventurier international au XVIII^e siècle: Théodore von Neuhoff, baron westphalien et roi de Corse,” in *Mélanges offerts à J. Béranger* (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), 203–19.

happened, they fooled no one and were regarded as jokes. Contemporaries found their presence troubling and not only because of the criminal intentions that many harbored. Imposture counterposed openness. Especially in their assumption – their frequent assumption – of a noble identity, imposters challenged burgher self-understanding and lifestyles. They served as well as targets in attacks on the more general failings of monarchs and nobles who themselves formed republican antitheses. Reactions to imposters varied; attraction, amusement, and laughter were as common as apprehension, disdain, disgust, hatred, and scorn.

Any quick survey of the archives in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg over the long eighteenth century soon turns up a long series of imposters whose fakery and pretenses ran the gamut from the mundane to the extraordinary, the simple to the complex, and the believable to the preposterous. In Amsterdam in 1664, Joost Gerhard van den Schilt (or perhaps he was one Frans Michiel van den Schilt?) took the name Jonker Wouter van Boonenburgh, publicly styling himself “a gentleman of noble extraction.” In this guise he concluded a bigamous marriage in order to bilk his new wife and her relatives. That was not the only swindle his masquerade facilitated. Then, in 1778, “a certain Italian of outwardly good bearing and countenance, calling himself Pietro Regis from Rome” aroused suspicion. As the respectable Regis, he palmed off on “Messrs. Aaron de Jacob de Prado and Sons, honest merchants on the Exchange in Amsterdam” a bill of exchange in the amount of f50,000 that turned out, like all his papers and references, to be false. Its spuriousness remained undiscovered until after he had received its face value in diamonds and other gems. In the same year, the Amsterdam authorities banned another “Antonio, who called himself the Comte de Viscovisch” for his “riotous behavior.” In 1753, it was the fake “Baron Boksdorf” who, in cahoots with a woman and a Jewish cardsharp, set into motion a positive tide-race of frauds.⁷⁰

Imposters popped up almost as frequently in the smaller city of Antwerp. In 1751, the Antwerp magistrates investigated one Franciscus Ferdinandus “calling himself the Baron de Wippeler.” Described as a person “sans aveu,” he had once served in the forces of Saxony but then apparently deserted and fled to The Hague where he “insinuated himself with several persons there, and fleeced them out of considerable sums.” In Antwerp, he had a serious confrontation with Franciscus Schoenmaeker, striking him “with such force and fury” that Schoenmaeker suffered “several serious wounds and contusions on his head . . . and shed a great deal of blood.” The “Baron” asserted that Schoenmaeker had offended him and “that he as a man of honor could not,

⁷⁰ *Sententie Tegen den Persoon hem selven noemende Joost Gerhard van den Schilt, Hem valsche-
lijk uytgevende voor Jonckhr. Wouter van Boonenburgh. Heer van Heerde en Griet, Over-
Leen-Heer van Oegen en Raedt-Verwalt. Gepronuncieert by den Gerechte van 's Gravenhage,
den 20. October 1664* (n.p., n.p., 1664), Knuttel 8969; on Viscovisch, in SA, inv. 5061, 648–9;
on Regis, *NJ* (July–December 1778): 1277–8.

and would not, abide such an insult.” The Antwerp authorities banished him from the city for ten years.⁷¹

Imposters generated anxiety and it sometimes proved hard for contemporaries, as it does for later historians, to distinguish between persons of elevated rank and real accomplishments, on the one hand, and climbers, imposters, and frauds, on the other. Was the adventurer Baron Mazani arrested in Hamburg in 1772 for swindling jewels and money from the Polish Countess von Tarling a genuine nobleman or just another humbug? The rhetoric could be caustic and overtly political; dislike for Hercule-Louis Turinetti, the Markies van Prié and governor of the Austrian Netherlands from 1716 to 1724, expressed itself in a description of him as “an Italian fortune-hunter” who rose from low beginnings to “scale the heights.”⁷² More obvious imposters were men like the *soi-disant* “Prince” Terquiny (actually one Franchois Louis Triaquin) who, after firing a shot at his sister-in-law and wounding her in 1666, fled to Antwerp. Eventually, he received a pardon and returned to Antwerp where he “rode [around] with his wife in a coach [and four], with a servant in red livery.” He was still in Antwerp in 1693. There, he lived quite openly as a “false prince” until at least 1693.⁷³ In a more amusing vein, there was Isaak Samuel Polak, who called himself van Harwitz, but was better known as “Baron Aard-appel” – Baron Potato – and who under the name van Harwitz launched sundry deceitful projects, involving several monetary swindles. A defrocked monk passed himself off as the Baron de la Mark, and so on.⁷⁴

Imposters and impostures can certainly be located in virtually every time and place (and, for that matter, at virtually every social level). While one always can point to striking exceptions that stretch credibility almost to the breaking point, some combinations of traits and actions occurred more frequently than others. One was the assumption of a noble guise to work a financial swindle and it bore special valences in the merchant republics.

Pretense

Pretending nobility formed perhaps the most common, if by no means the only, artful dodge imposters used. Their goals, too, could be many; simple social-climbing, or passing, were clear objectives. Financial gain, however, was one that burghers in the merchant republics almost invariably associated with

⁷¹ 27 January 1751, FA, V 242, fols. 641–4.

⁷² StAHbg, Senat Cl. VIII Nr. Xa, 1772, pp. 297–8, 300, 303, 343, 362, 372; Mertens/Torfs, 6: 118n.

⁷³ Chronicle entry for 1666, “Justitie misluctt over den Prins Terquiny t’Antwerpen,” FA, PK 118.

⁷⁴ *Het leven van Isaack Samuel Polak, zig noemende van Harwitz, alias Baron Aard-appel: Behelzende een verhaal van zyne geboorte, opvoedinge, gepleegde bedriegeryen en vlugt, uit ‘s Gravenhage na Vianen* (The Hague: Burger Vermeulen, 1771); FA, V 121 (1788) [Baron de la Mark].

them. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Irish rake and cardsharp, Patrick Hurley (who may have been the inspiration for William Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon*) swished his way across northern Europe and:

acting the part of a Nobleman, he travell'd with his Retinue into Holland, where passing for an Irish Person of Quality at the Hague, by his cunning Insinuations of Generosity, and outward Splendor among the Dutch, he obtain'd so much Favour among them, as to borrow Ten Thousand Pounds of the Bank of Amsterdam, which he carried clear off the Ground, without ever coming to an Account for their unusual Civility to Strangers.⁷⁵

How many noble pretenders did exactly the same thing, or how thickly they pullulated, is impossible to say. They were surely not uncommon. The number of stories and reports that appeared in print about them then multiplied their presence prodigiously and made them quite palpably real even to those who never encountered them.

Such deceptions relied on elaborately constructed frauds and these impersonations differed in sophistication and boldness from ordinary criminals who assumed aliases. Yet there existed, in the realm of the imagination, not much distance between one sort of crook, like the highwayman Baron von Franckenberg and his sidekick, Captain Gieseke, and a far more interesting character altogether: "the so-called Count Cajetani." The three men could, for example, encounter each other in the literary afterworld (*Reich der Toten*). Such fictive conversations confronted those who had never met in real life but who found each other in an unreal world where each functioned as the representative or spokesperson for a point of view, often a political one.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Theophilus Lucas, *Memoirs of the Lives, Intrigues, and Comical Adventures of the most Famous Gamesters and Celebrated Sharpers in the Reigns of Charles II., James II., William III., and Queen Anne* (London: Jonas Brown, 1714), 97–123.

⁷⁶ On Franckenberg [Ernst Werth] and Gieseke, see a series of pamphlets in CB, H456/5 and *Etwas Neues aus dem Reiche der Todten/ Oder: Sichere Nachricht Von der Ankunfft und curiensen ENTREVUE, Des B. Franckenbergs und C. Giseckens im Reiche der Todten/ Durch den Todten-Reichs-Post-Reuter eben itzo rapportiret* (1724) in StAHbg, Bibliothek, no. 34 in omnibus vol. 72; "Ausführliche und Gründliche Nachricht, Von dem Leben, Uebelthaten, Inquisition, und Tod zweyer in Hamburg den 6ten Mart. 1724 aufgehenden vornehmen Diebe/ Ernsts von Werth/ oder so genandten Baron von Franckenbergs; Und Hinrichs Gieseckens/ oder des insgemein so genandten CAPTAINS," in Senat Cl. VII llt. Mb Nr. 3 Vol. 1). A copy of this is reprinted in *Neu-eröffneter Schau-Platz der berühmtesten Betrüger, Spitzbuben, Mörder, Kirchen- und Strassen-Räuber dieses Seculi. Samt deren Execution und accuraten Portraits* (2nd enlarged edn.; Hamburg: Thomas von Wiorings-Erben, 1725). The pamphlet, *Zusammenkunft in dem Reiche der Todten zwischen dem Alchimisten Cajetans und denen Maleficanten E. v. Werth und Hinrich Giesecken* (Hamburg?, 1724), linked the two robbers to Cajetani. For a similar "post-death" meeting, see the encounter imagined between Baron Neuhooff (king of Corsica) and the Stuart pretender to the English throne: *Gespräche im Reiche der Träumenden, zwischen dem vermeynten corsischen Könige Theodoro Antonio Baron von Neuhooff, und dem jungen englischen Cron-Prätendenten Carolo Eduardo Ludovico Casimiro, sich fälschlich einbildenden Printzen von Wallis, und Regenten von Schottland etc.* (Frankfurt a. Main: n.p., 1747).

The Cajetani of the world generated the most interesting circumstances and provoked the greatest commentary and concern. Although small fry compared to some others, Count Cajetani's story highlights themes that troubled, but also excited, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political and cultural fancies. His imposture presented a real situation that demanded real action. The responses reflect how good burghers viewed such flashmen and defined themselves against them. Men like Cajetani, until exposed, created anxious situations for local legal and judicial authorities. City justices always accorded men of rank special treatment in order to protect their honor, but also, quite simply, to avoid blow-ups with major states and noble families sensitive to slights. This so-called count posed as a member "from that famous Italian lineage" that had produced Cardinal Cajetani (1469–1534), Master of the Dominican Order and the famous opponent of Martin Luther. He was, however, only the offspring of an ordinary Neapolitan. Over the years, he had sold his services as a goldmaker at several courts including the imperial, Bavarian, and Palatine ones, until he was finally unmasked as a fraud in Prussia; he fled from there literally by night and fog.⁷⁷ Although Cajetani apparently never set foot in Hamburg, the city's publicists linked his pretenses and crimes with those of lesser figures like the thieves Franckenberg and Gieseke. Cajetani possessed all the traits associated with noble imposters. He pretended to a well-known noble name and that assertion made authorities cautious (at least at first) of accusing him of any malfeasance. His assumed noble status also meant that he was taken on trust; thus he was able to swindle money on credit.

In the many stories of noble pretenders, the theme of fraud assumed a double significance. First, name-fraud transgressed social categories and cultural expectations. Behind obvious deceit lay more sinister, often criminal, motives. One was economic; the use of imposture to swindle money. The second was social and moral; the use of a guise of nobility to infiltrate burgher families, often with purported evil intentions. Each instance created moments when good burghers articulated their sense of morality, propriety, and – in a more political vein – their sense of civism.

Imposters, therefore, linked several worrisome issues in the minds of good burghers in the merchant republics. First, there was their similarity to monarchs and nobles. Second, they threatened to violate the expectation of open and transparent business dealings. Imposters, and especially noble imposters, often intended to cozen money from the unwary; they were thieves. Imposters, and

⁷⁷ *Neu-eröffneter Schau-Platz*, 733–4. Questions of the honorable treatment of nobles caught in difficult, or even criminal, situations could generate serious diplomatic difficulties. See, for instance, Lindemann, *Liaisons dangereuses*, 77–129. The claim of "gold-making" was not in itself suspicious, although the alchemists and others who found good positions at courts in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries became less believable in the eighteenth century and were far more frequently considered frauds. See Nummedal, *Alchemy*, 147–76; Andre Wakefield, *The Disordered Police State: German Cameralism as Science and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 26–48.

again most often noble imposters, often struck closer to home, in the very families of merchants, corrupting their sons with cards, finery, and noble ideas of honor (that sometimes led to duels) and seducing their daughters, then abandoning them or abducting them (often with the woman's collusion) to make their fortunes. That perfectly legitimate nobles did the very same things, or were thought to do so, only exacerbated the problem.

The whole issue of imposture could be used to illustrate various forms of pretense considered undesirable and inappropriate civic behaviors; they were often treated tongue-in-cheek rather than heart-in-throat. Satirists played with the malleable topos of imposture to press home moral points; the idea of the deceiver deceived was a frequent twist. This genre enjoyed popularity virtually everywhere in western Europe, but its authors often referenced mercantile cities like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, especially when the moral involved money. For example, in 1707 Thomas Bock published *The Comical Bargain: or, Trick upon Trick* that told the story of how a baker's apprentice posed as a "Hamburg merchant" to try to win the hand of an "eminent doctor's daughter." "Accordingly, having Equipp'd himself with a fine Blue Suit, a long Wig, and a Sword; and all other Accoutrements fitting for a Man in that Station," he went courting. As it turned out, her fortune was as great as his; "And so, as most Marriages are a Trick on one side, thir [*sic*] was Trick on both." The tale concluded: "and the People to whom he pass'd his Word are like to get nothing but Hamburg Bills for their Money," that is, nothing but paper.⁷⁸ The *Comical Bargain* was, of course, a fiction, but one attuned to the times, with a moral barb that painfully pricked the good burghers of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. The ultimate moral of the story – the dangers of economic fraud inherent in new mercantile practices and especially the use of negotiable paper – is dealt with in greater detail later.

Imposture also carried other meanings in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe: Jewish imposture and Jewish deceit. Despite the much vaunted tolerant attitude of Amsterdam and Hamburg vis-à-vis their Jewish populations, and despite the presence and economic importance of Jews in all three cities, anti-Semitism remained active and at times virulent. Hamburg's tolerance was limited; Jews possessed few rights but suffered no official molestation. The situation in Antwerp was less favorable; theoretically, neither the Spanish nor the Austrian Habsburgs (before Joseph II promulgated his Toleration Edict in 1782) allowed Jews to settle as citizens in Brabant cities. Still, a goodly handful of Jews not only lived in Antwerp but actually had attained citizenship. One example was Abraham Arons who became a citizen in 1728 (or perhaps earlier) and remained one for thirty years until the central government demanded the city revoke his citizenship. Thus, despite attempts by the magistracy to loosen

⁷⁸ Thomas Bocks, *The Comical Bargain: or, Trick upon Trick. Being a pleasant and true relation of one T. Bocks, a baker's prentice . . . that went for a Hamburg-Merchant, and courted an eminent doctor's daughter, etc.* (London, 1707), 1, 3, 8.

restrictions on the settling of Jewish families in the city, pointing out that not only were the Jews in Antwerp “peaceable and completely loyal” but were also “the soul of commerce,” the governments in Madrid and Vienna remained obdurate.⁷⁹

Some extreme occurrences of anti-Semitic rhetoric (and action) accompanied economic frauds (or perceived frauds) and often ones associated with Jews whose true identity seemed unknown or deliberately concealed. The days of the outright persecution of new Christians (whether of Jewish or Muslim background) had passed, but even in cities with a relatively good record of toleration toward Jews and other religious minorities and where Jewish communities of substantial size and wealth had settled, recent converts often remained suspect. Jewish merchants never quite shed the stigma connected to usury and many believed they were busily hatching sinister financial dealings maliciously calculated to drag Christians down into economic disaster while they posed as honest brokers.⁸⁰ In the late seventeenth century, a baptized Jew, named Meyer Marx, concocted a jewel racket to cheat the Hamburg bank. In the process he involved, and ruined, an elderly senator, Cord Vegesack. In 1731, responding to complaints from merchants, Hamburg levied a fine on any Jews who sought to change money on the Exchange. A 1763 play by Johann Jacob Dusch, published and staged in Hamburg, featured a usurer, unsubtly named Süß (thus obviously an unscrupulous Jew), who tricks the honest merchant, Erast, into giving him a promissory note in the amount of 20,000 marks to prevent the ruin of an old friend of Erast’s (equally unsubtly presented as an ailing elderly widow).⁸¹ The story of the Amsterdam Jewish banker Aron

⁷⁹ It is necessary to avoid buying into the “myth of Dutch tolerance” as much as it is necessary to recognize that toleration had many levels in early modern cities like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. On the legal position of Jews in Amsterdam, see Arend H. Huusen, “The Legal Position of the Jews in the Dutch Republic c.1590–1796,” in Jonathan Israel and Reiner Salverda (eds.), *Dutch Jewry: Its History and Secular Culture (1500–2000)* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 25–41. Huusen’s conclusion here on the decision made in 1615 in Amsterdam is that “the fundamental issue was made clear, i.e. that the settled Jews would in fact be tolerated; no mention is made of any intention to limit their numbers” (33). During the seventeenth century, the toleration of Jews in Hamburg was greatly contested and even in the eighteenth century, toleration “simply meant that one ceased to persecute them [Jews].” Joachim Whaley, *Religious Toleration and Social Change in Hamburg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 70–110, quote 110. On Jews in Antwerp, see Ephraim Schmidt, *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Antwerpen* (Antwerp: S. M. Ontwikkeling, 1963), 46–85; Ludo Abicht, *De Joden van Antwerpen* (Antwerp-Baarn: Hadewijch, 1993), 21–30, 27 (quote); on Arons, see Prims 9: 24, 26, 56. Compare the situation in Marseille: Takeda, *Between Crown & Commerce*, 97–104.

⁸⁰ For example, Hochem Benedictus Moses, *Den bedrieger selfs bedrogen, of den jood Baaroege van Kassell in ’t Rasphuis, bekend onder naam van joodsche scher-meester bebelzende op een boertige manier zun doorslepen bedriegeryen, en hoe zyn welveridende straffe tot Amsterdam daar voor heeft ontvangen* (Hardewick: n.p., 1746).

⁸¹ On Meyer Marx and Vegesack, see Carl Trummer, *Vorträge über Tortur, Hexenverfolgung, Vehmgerichte* (Hamburg: Meißner, 1844), 1: 58–61; and “Kutze einfältige jedennoch Warhaffte Nachricht Von denen Zweyen Pfänden/ Welche den gemeine Gerücht nach Von mir CORDT

Abrahamsz. from 1736 brought out a nasty rash of anti-Semitism. Abrahamsz. was branded “an arch-swindler” who presented himself as an honest broker in order to embezzle funds from good Christians who trusted him.⁸²

These incidents highlight the most important reason for studying imposters; their cases reveal the values placed on trust in government, business, and society more generally, whether or not burghers and civic authorities embodied such qualities, which many did only imperfectly. In this milieu, the impersonation of nobles seemed to generate the most fraught situations, potentially even more damaging than the ones Jews schemed into existence.

Two circumstances interacted to make the noble imposter a fairly common reality in cities like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. First, all three places attracted a considerable number of migrants and foreigners. Foreigners of all kinds, from lands near, far, and even quite exotic (like Albania) congregated in these cities, drawn there for multiple reasons. Self-exiles, like Christina of Sweden, who spent months in both Antwerp and Hamburg, or traveling crowned heads, like Tsar Peter I of Russia, received varying degrees of ceremony and courtesy, if also certain apprehension, even when these personages sought (perhaps not too seriously?) to remain incognito. Prince Eugene of Savoy whiled away time in Amsterdam even making a famous visit to its brothels.

A whole range of lesser lights, fleeing unacceptable marriages, brutal husbands, nasty or ungrateful relatives, or uncomfortable political situations passed through these cities or even settled there for longer periods of time. Then there was the diplomatic corps. Some nobles migrated from place to place, following their duties or, if down on their luck, seeking employment or attempting to find at least a temporary perch. Impecunious or financially embarrassed nobles were numerous and often extremely mobile. Despite attempts made by cities to track this titled driftwood, movement in and out of cities for these men

VEGGESACK Und Meinem Seel: Sohn GUILLIAM VEGGESACK sollen in Banco versetzt seyn,” (1697) in StAHg, Bibliothek, no. 52, omnibus vol. 208; F. Georg Buek, *Die Hamburgischen Oberalten, ihre bürgerliche Wirksamkeit und ihre Familien* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1857), 134–5; on forbidding Jews to offer bills on the Exchange, notice from 23 October 1730 in *Gazette van Antwerpen*; Johann Jacob Dusch, *Der Bankerot, ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel* (Hamburg: Dieterich Anton Harmsen, 1763).

⁸² C. Lonius, [=J. W. Claus van Laar], *Den bedrieger bedroogen, of Den gevangen smous [Aäron Abrams]; zynde een verhaal van zeer veele aanmerkelyke voorvallen; raakende het leeven en bedryf van een beruchten ryken gevangen smous. Doormengt, met veel ernstige en boertige aanmerkingen, en vermakelyke Geschiedenissen; daar onder, het beleegeren van de Stad Goes, op Sacraments; dag. enz. Boertende beschreven in zes t'samenspraaken* (Amsterdam: Pieter Aldewerelt, 1737). This is just one of the several violently anti-Semitic publications that flowed from Lonius's pen. Another case, from 1775, was of the “baptized Jew and a famous usurer” Charles [or Lazaro de] Swabesco, also known as Jan Smits, whose swindles included fraudulent bills of exchange. NA, 5507 and 5508.1. See also *De tweede Kato Kamerling, of De gestraffte swendelaar* (1775) and *Korte dog waaragtige leevensloop van eenen proselyt uit Amsterdam, genaamd Charles de Schwabesso, commercie raad en hertog van Saxen, alsmede zyne belydenis, volgens de Nederl. Couranten van den 12 July 1770* (Utrecht: J. C. Ten Bosch, 1770).

and women proved relatively simple. The economic character of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, after all, necessitated a less restrictive policy on the admission of migrants of all kinds, even the poor. Thus, along with the well-to-do and the prosperous, the skilled and the adept, the honest and the upright, came the poor, the crooked, and those who had cast free their moorings for whatever reason. Here, too, landed many of those who pretended nobility and who impersonated their betters.

What did it take to pull off such impersonations? The increasing fluidity of social relations and the ongoing rearrangement of social groupings in the eighteenth century greatly facilitated deceit. While the boundaries between nobles and other social groups did not disappear, and retained much of their importance even after the French Revolution, things changed, although the old motto – *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* – retained much truth. Nonetheless, noble hierarchies softened or even dissolved as nobles merged with other groups. Talented men could quickly scale the ladders of power and become nobles or powerful ministers. Two of the most famous, or rather infamous, were the erstwhile physician Johann Friedrich Struensee in Denmark and Josef Süß Oppenheimer in Württemberg. These were men to be reckoned with. If both ended ignobly on the scaffold, many others – such as the Baron Heinrich Carl von Schimmelmann – attained positions of great power, despite their quite humble origins. Schimmelmann started out as a river bargeman (or so the story goes), became financial advisor to the Danish crown, and died as the wealthiest man in Denmark. In this atmosphere, pseudo-nobles or would-be nobles found it rather easy to elbow their way into respectable society. Political and economic factors only stirred the mix and made it increasingly difficult to predict whether it was cream or scum that rose to the top.

The citizens of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg had, therefore, over the years gained a good deal of experience with nobles – much of it negative.⁸³ As we have seen, considerable unease attached to the intrusion of foreign customs in each city. Too many concrete experiences with foreigners and nobles strengthened the prejudice. Such difficulties also reinforced stereotypes about those with titles and bolstered ideas about how the character of republics and burghers differed, or should differ, from that of other polities, particularly monarchies. It should be obvious that as the distance between nobles and burghers shrank perceptibly, and as burghers and nobles mingled socially, the problems, and the weight attached to them, actually grew. Nobles (real or fake) could add a bit of flash and color to an otherwise achromic social landscape. Nobles also represented, in one form or another, powerful states or important men.

The dangers nobles – real or faux – presented, or seemed to present to burgher society was political, but also social and moral. One of the most troublesome characteristics of nobles, besides imputed arrogance toward “mere

⁸³ I explore some of these problems in Lindemann, *Liaisons dangereuses*, 69–76.

merchants and shopkeepers,” was their violence and their willingness to defend their honor with lethal force; dueling remained a persistent problem.⁸⁴ The disturbing conduct of the *soi-disant* (and perhaps real?) Antonio, Comte de Viscovich, in Amsterdam resulted in his banishment in 1788.⁸⁵ Equally troubling was the difference that continued to exist between the more *galant*, libertine lives of many nobles (and noble frauds) and the expectations, if not necessarily the realities, of burghers as to proper behavior. Even when the ethics, lifestyles, and the morality of the two groups converged, tensions continued, especially around sexual liaisons. No city’s chronicle failed to produce numerous stories of burghers’ daughters swept off their feet by nobles or their impersonators. Seductions and abductions, real or feigned, haunted urban imaginations. They were also an exceedingly popular literary trope, producing tragedies but also comedies. The Italian playwright, Carlo Goldoni, whose plays in Dutch and German translations draw large audiences in Hamburg and Amsterdam, had a stable of them. Stock characters included the virtuous maiden of good family and the handsome but impoverished noble officer.⁸⁶

Disturbing, but also deliciously sensationalist, stories of seductions and abductions by nobles appeared in all three cities. Newspaper reportage, pamphlets, ballads, *Intelligenzers*, communications between authorities searching for lost daughters, and word of mouth catapulted them onto a broader European stage and settled them into the realm of literature. The number of abductions that fell into the category of *doorgaan* – that is, elopements – was in the Dutch Republic perhaps facilitated by the proximity of areas where the couples could only be pursued with difficulty. Culembourg, Ravenstein, Vianen, and Antwerp were the Gretna Greens of the early modern Netherlands. In 1640, for example, the government of Amsterdam complained that “many young persons . . . run off to Culembourg or Vianen” to wed without permission.⁸⁷ The abductions of Catharina van Orliens from The Hague in 1663 and the far more sinister and complicated story from 1700 of Sophia de Maa achieved the greatest notoriety. Similar events underlay the writing of the popular *The Abducted*

⁸⁴ The history of dueling has been extensively discussed in the historical literature. See, for example, François Billacois, *The Duel: Its Rise and Fall in Early Modern France*, trans. and ed. Trista Selous (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Friedhelm Guttandin, *Das paradoxe Schicksal der Ehre: Zum Wandel der adeligen Ehre und zur Bedeutung vom Duell und Ehre für den monarchischen Zentralstaat* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1992); Ute Frevert, “The Taming of the Noble Ruffian: Male Violence and Dueling in Early Modern and Modern Germany,” in Pieter Spierenburg (ed.), *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and American* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1998), 37–63.

⁸⁵ SA, inv. 5061, 649, fol. 27.

⁸⁶ Dewald, *Nobilities*, 57. One popular seduction play in Hamburg was Johann Friedrich Jünger’s *Die Entführung: Ein Lustspiel in 3 Aufzügen* (Leipzig: n.p., 1792).

⁸⁷ Quoted in Donald Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin in Holland in de 17de en 18de eeuw: Processtukken en moralisten over aspecten van het laat 17de- en 18de-eeuwse gezinsleven* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1982), 126.

Helena from 1720.⁸⁸ Foreign nobles, such as the Count Mirabeau who had fled to Amsterdam in 1777 after abducting – or running away with? – the wife of a royal official in Besançon, presented another series of problems involving their extradition and clouded diplomatic matters with powerful states such as France.⁸⁹

In his discussion of the *Moral Life of Our Fathers*, the early twentieth-century professor of church history at Leiden, Laurentius Knappert, compiled a long list of such cases dating from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. The seriousness with which Dutch contemporaries regarded the crime can be read in the ordinance of 1580; it set the death penalty on abduction. In point of fact, however, such ultimate punishments were rarely applied and greater leniency, or even complete freedom from penalty, was common when no force was used, when the woman had colluded in her “raptus,” and when her parents eventually agreed to the union.⁹⁰

The false Prince of Albania

As alarming, and perhaps even more so, were the other thefts imposters carried off, not of daughters and honor, but of money. Although real nobles, and especially those of small means who fluttered around the crepuscular margins of respectable society, could master the game, it was generally the doubly deceitful imposter who fared the best and pulled off the biggest coups. The “false Prince of Albania” in the early 1770s found it child’s play to swindle thousands from bankers and merchants in sophisticated mercantile centers such as Amsterdam and Venice, leaving financiers and businessmen holding worthless letters of exchange not once but many times.⁹¹

In the 1770s this false prince, Stiépan Annibale, worked truly miraculous scams in Amsterdam.⁹² He and his brother, Primislao, had been born into the lower Albanian nobility; their father was an impoverished seigneur and the

⁸⁸ Jacob van Lennep, *Een schaking in de XVIIe eeuw* (Utrecht: n.p., 1850) and Jacob van Lennep, *De moeder en de magistraat: Eene ware geschiedenis uit het archief van het voormalige Hof van Holland opgedolven en medegedeeld* (Amsterdam: Gebroeders Binger, 1856). See also on Sophia van Noortwijk, Eduard van Biema, “De geschiedenis van Sofia van Noortwijk,” *De Haghe* (1911): 1–129. *De ontschaakte Amsterdamsze Helena: Behelzende De wonderlyke Voorvallen, zo van Liefde als van het Geval, die een voorname Juffer van Amsterdam in verschillende Gewesten des Waerelds en van gelyken de Turkze Slaverny, t’zedert weinige Jaaren herwaarts overgekomen zyn* (Amsterdam: De Erve d’Wed: Jacobus van Egmont, 1720?).

⁸⁹ On the Mirabeau case, SA, inv. 5061, 647, fols. 180–7.

⁹⁰ Haks, *Huwelijk*, 127–8; Laurentius Knappert, *Het zedelijk leven onzer vaderen in de achttiende eeuw* (Harlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1910), 49–50; Laurentius Knappert, *Verloving en huwelijk in vroeger dagen* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff & Co., 1914).

⁹¹ Casanova, *History*, 12: 119–25.

⁹² Information on the Amsterdam incidents comes from the excellent study by Haitsma Mulier, “De affaire Zanolovich” and the earlier treatment by van Biema, “Stiépan Annibale.” See also Stroev, *Les aventuriers*, passim.

siblings possessed little money and somewhat dubious titles. When life as a professional gambler did not generate the princely income Stiépan desired, he changed his tack, washing up in Amsterdam in 1772 with another ruse in mind. Here he staged his biggest coup, one that involved the bankers Chomel and Jordan.⁹³

Chomel and Jordan were flattered by the attention of the charming newcomer, now calling himself Count Zanolich, that is, Annibale, and hastened to be of service to this wealthy and well-spoken young nobleman. In return for a bill of exchange in the amount of 3 500 *zechinen*, due in three years and signed by Lord Lincoln, as well as a bill drawn on Genoa for 10,000 *piasters*, they advanced Zanolich *f*27,000, partly in cash and partly in diamonds.⁹⁴ In addition, Zanolich offered the pair the “most solemn assurances . . . that one of his ships, laden with Greek wine, was soon due in Texel” and that he would sign its cargo over to them. All this was a fiction. The note over Lincoln’s signature was a forgery (“a faked copy of one of the Lord [Lincoln]’s bills”). Zanolich had indeed won an enormous sum of money from Lincoln in Florence at the famous café Lamberti, but that money had already been paid in the form of bills drawn on Lincoln’s London banker, bills that Zanolich had quickly discounted for ready money. When Chomel and Jordan tried to liquidate the Genoese bills, they were returned with protest, that is, with a demand for immediate payment. As for the ship with the Greek wine, it never existed.

Amazingly, Zanolich soon quieted Chomel and Jordan’s fears, fobbing them off with the excuse “that perhaps in the case of the Genoese bills some misunderstandings had developed” and that recent storms had obviously delayed his vessel’s arrival in Texel. Zanolich proposed that he go to Italy to straighten things out. Although Chomel and Jordan grumbled, they nonetheless paid Zanolich’s traveling costs and provided him with “valuable letters of recommendation.”

Zanolich then left Amsterdam and traveled to Naples where he switched tactics, using the letter of recommendation given him by his Dutch dupes to pile up another pyramid of deceptions. After gaining the trust of the Venetian representative in Naples, Signor Cavalli, he introduced to Cavalli a young man named Nicolo Prowich as the sole heir of a flourishing commercial house. He led the resident to believe that he could develop a profitable trade with Holland through the Prowich commercial connections. He then arranged to have Cavalli recommend Prowich to Chomel and Jordan who were “extremely pleased that they would thus be able to develop new commercial contacts with subjects of the Venetian Republic.” As his first act, Prowich assumed Zanolich’s obligations.

⁹³ “Levensbijzonderheden van den Beruchten Bedrieger Stipen Mali, anders Graaf Zannowich, of den zoogenaamden Prins van Albanie,” in SA, Bibliotheek, J. 1.089.

⁹⁴ Just who this Lord Lincoln was is unclear. There are a few possibilities including Henry Fiennes Pelham-Clinton, Earl of Lincoln (1750–78), and Thomas Pelham-Clinton, 3rd Duke of Newcastle and 10th Earl of Lincoln (1752–95).

The bankers wrote off the debts in lieu of future profits that, of course, never materialized for “Nicolo Prowich” was none other than Zanovich’s younger brother, Primislao. Slowly, the whole edifice of false promises and fake bills began to crumble as Chomel and Jordan finally discovered, to their horror, that Prowich had tried to insure a ship laden with wine, the *Minerva*, for f150,000 and that the “same ship and its valuable cargo were nothing more than phantasms.” The game was out and the brothers exposed. The outraged attempts of the Amsterdam authorities and Chomel and Jordan to retrieve their losses involved the Dutch in difficult negotiations with Venice that almost pushed the two republics into a commercial war.

Meanwhile, Zanovich and his brother had absconded, but quickly resurfaced to continue their cons. Zanovich returned to his wandering ways, appearing, for example, in Paris in 1774 as the Italian Count Saluzzo. Later he unwisely returned to The Hague where his scheming soon plunged him into legal hot water. Finally, he turned up again in Amsterdam in 1786 where he was arrested, having been recognized by a clerk employed by Chomel and Jordan. First held in the kind of detention reserved for citizens and nobles, he was soon transferred to the criminal prison, which he “as a nobleman” could not endure. Two days after being so confined, the guard found him “swimming in his own blood and lying – stiff – on the floor” of his cell. He had “bitten open his veins with his teeth” and then widened the wounds with pieces of glass. He was 35 years old. His body was displayed at the local hospital where hundreds viewed it and thousands followed him to his grave. He was clearly not without talents and, like Casanova, he, too, was a *homme de lettres*, or at least a homunculus.⁹⁵

Conclusions

Stiépan Annibale’s story was one of the most sensational and extraordinary of a century that throbbed with scandals. Few noble imposters could rival his audacity or his ability to slither out of the grasp of the law and his creditors. His adventures, if unique in their boldness, were hardly unique in their general features. Lesser Annibales tried the same dodges and tricks, generally not succeeding on the same scale, or not for so long, or taking as their patsies men of somewhat lesser stature than Amsterdam merchant bankers or Venetian resident-ministers.

Even if we accept, in P. T. Barnum’s immortal phrase, that “there’s a sucker born every minute,” the ease with which imposters gulled bankers and merchants of exceptional business acumen seems quite astonishing. But is it? What can we identify in the culture of these merchant republics (if not exclusively there) that facilitated imposters and their gambits? It does not seem reasonable

⁹⁵ “Levensbijzonderheden”; Haitsma Mulier, “De affaire Zanovich,” 37 describes the suicide and the subsequent events. For a description of his writings and their impact, see Biema, “Avanturier,” 514–18; Stroev, *Les aventuriers*, 83–5, 92, 286–9, 293–4.

to argue that it could only have happened in the long eighteenth century or only in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg; such is obviously not the case. Nonetheless, a series of circumstances favored a certain kind of imposture, one that offered the biggest rewards and seemed especially likely to succeed. One might, of course, point out that in an age of inadequate police forces and poor means of identification, such impostures proved simple to pull off and that no mystery lurks here. Perhaps. Yet the scams also worked because the tales imposters told and the actions they performed neither outraged nor surprised. Several factors or circumstances explain why such impostures and such financial chicanery succeeded so frequently in the long eighteenth century.

First, the gradual closing of the social gap between nobles and burghers, the rise of a more generalized standard of gentleman, and the compelling weight of wealth and learning were all critical. Equally important counted the fluidity of the economic world and the innovative financial practices that were being developed and implemented in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and that form the substance of two subsequent chapters. Both fostered a mood conducive to economic wild-catting. In this climate, merchants and businessmen became increasingly uncertain – and increasingly nervous – about the tenets of what may be termed “economic morality,” an apprehensiveness that expressed itself in various ways but especially in concerns about issues of business ethics and trust more generally.⁹⁶ Certainly, in all merchant-republics the rhetoric of solid business practices, honest and transparent deals, and slow but sure accumulation of wealth persisted and even increased throughout the seventeenth and into eighteenth centuries, and well beyond. Hand in glove with worries about the new slipperiness of that economic world ran condemnations of “luxus” and “foreign ways” even if reality rarely mirrored rhetoric.

One major reason rogues in ruffles proliferated in these years, therefore, lies in the shifting character of the economic and financial worlds. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries teemed with get-rich-quick schemes and projectors of whom John Law was only the most famous or infamous.⁹⁷ Like Law, many noble imposters migrated frequently, because mobility served their subterfuges well. Cities, and especially those large enough to foster anonymity and to encourage at least some acceptance of strangers, multiplied their opportunities. Law went from Paris to Venice to The Hague to Amsterdam and back to Paris, before his *succès fou* under the Regency turned into a fiasco. Others, like the Comte de Floor and Gabriel Brito de Souza, also popped up in several places, moving to seek better hunting grounds or to avoid exposure and arrest. Speculation in stocks, the discounting of bills of exchange, and especially the “bubble” and “windy” trades of the late 1600s and early 1700s, where paper

⁹⁶ On these issues in seventeenth-century Holland, see Anne Goldgar, *Tulipmania: Money, Honor, and Knowledge in the Dutch Golden Age* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁹⁷ Lande, *Rise*. The recent appearance of a popular account, Gleeson, *Millionaire*, testifies to the continued fascination with Law.

fortunes stacked up literally overnight and then scattered just as rapidly, opened room for imposters to work their magic. Bills of exchange and notes drawn on distant banks lubricated the European-wide economy – an economy based in the merchant republics and other urban financial hubs such as London and Paris – and here imposters, noble and non-noble alike, saw their chance and moved in for the kill. Their claims and their methods varied little in fact from those respectable merchants used daily. They added, it was true, a bit of flash (fancy clothes, jewels, and perhaps a uniform) and often a strong whiff of the exotic (puffing themselves as princes from far-off lands), but at base they formed as much a part of economic culture in these decades as investors in the Bank of England or holders of India companies' stock. To sum up, a stranger who appeared with a bill of exchange could be honest or dishonest, authentic or spurious. The difference was elusive because both types could engage – and both types did engage – in the very same activities.⁹⁸

Economic fluidity and social change marched shoulder to shoulder. Many foreigners who flocked to Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg came to make their fortunes by engaging in profitable, if sometimes dubious, business ventures, by wedding a wealthy wife, or perhaps by resorting to thievery or treachery. A measure of pretense or imposture, that is, seeming rather than being, served all of them well, whether they were at base reputable or not. Their very presence and their *modi operandi* often clashed with burgher ideals of economic propriety, social conduct, and political values. One should, however, hesitate to postulate clean distinctions; much of what “honest” and “upright” burghers and merchants did differed only a little from the ploys of swindlers and crooks. Indeed, that is why the schemes of the latter worked and worked so well.

Imposters are titillating and intriguing and if their dexterity and sheer brashness amaze us, they also often draw our sympathy and even pity. There is something essentially human about play-acting or about wishing to be someone else, at least for a time. That quality made us all root for the false Martin Guerre to “win,” return to Artigat with Bertrande, and live happily ever after. Those very human and probably universal qualities, as well as the fascination with people who played plastically with their lives, makes studying imposters a scintillating experience. They are, to put it bluntly, fun. The historical study of imposters is more than merely diverting, however. In examining the world of imposters and adventurers as they moved through the merchant republics, we must see them not as extraordinary people doing extraordinary things (or not

⁹⁸ Julian Hoppit, “The Use and Abuse of Credit in Eighteenth Century England,” in Neil McKendrick and R. B. Outhwaite, (eds.) *Business Life and Public Policy: Essays in Honour of D. C. Coleman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 65, 78; Mary Lindemann, “The Wind-Traders: Speculators and Frauds in Northern Europe, 1650–1720,” in Barbara A. Hanawalt and Anna Grotans (ed.), *Living Dangerously: On the Margins of Medieval and Renaissance Society* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 137–66.

only in that way), but rather as people whose impostures succeeded because they were attuned to the social, economic, and cultural constraints and possibilities of their day. This realization neither typecasts nor devalues them, but rather addresses basic historical issues of the extent to which individuals are able to bend, stretch, and expand their choices while never bursting the limits of their circumstances. Of course, they were not always successful or believed, but as we follow their lives we also trace the contours of the world that nurtured and sustained them.

In the merchant republics of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, imposture possessed yet another valence, and it was an intensely political one. Contemporaries associated imposture with the burgher's opposite: the noble. The category of noble embodied a whole range of actions and attitudes viewed as deeply offensive to the virtues and standards ruling the burgher's world. Nobles were violent, superficial, false, prodigal, and sexually predatory. Even when, or perhaps because, the two worlds of the noble and the burgher began to converge, or even to overlay, one another, the tensions remained and possibly even increased with greater proximity. Finally, too, imposture seemed synonymous with life at court and in monarchies, where dissimulation and deceit allowed one to rise and where the ability to conceal one's feelings and actions, rather than openness and honesty, was the essential key to success.⁹⁹

Obviously, it would be naive to believe that burghers possessed all the virtues and nobles all the vices; not even the spectatorial commentators or rabid anti-monarchs like Pieter de la Court went that far. Nor did all burghers disdain contact with nobility or fashion nobles as inherently false and disingenuous. Yet the antitheses between nobles and burghers, monarchs and republics, political transparency and opacity did not exist only in prescriptive literature: it flooded into political pamphleteering, into political debate, and into records investigating criminal activities that often sounded a moral tone. It was equally resonant economically: imposture as the obverse of guilelessness formed a major issue in the business dealings of the day. Clashes over the transparency of politics and over the right to participate in political life, or to supervise, for example, urban finances paralleled concerns about candor in business dealings, to which we now turn.

⁹⁹ Heß, *Beschreibung*, 2: 382.

Virtuous commerce

At the very beginning of the second decade of the eighteenth century, the *Spectator*'s fictional merchant, Sir Anthony Freeport, observed to his friend "Mr. Spectator" that:

There are not more useful Members in a Commonwealth than Merchants. They knit Mankind together in a mutual Intercoarse of good Offices, distribute the Gift of Nature, find Work for the Poor, and Wealth to the Rich, and Magnificence to the Great.¹

It does not take long to find similar sentiments echoed elsewhere. The *Netherlandish Spectator* argued that the "manly" pursuit of commerce had banished poverty and the "corrupting lusts" of leisure, "encouraged benevolence, nurtured common sense, [and] displaced superstition."² In Hamburg, too, the moral weeklies panegyricized the merchant as a "much more useful member of society, than a brooding philosopher or a boastful polymath."³ In places like Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Antwerp (albeit certainly not in these cities alone), the praise of the merchant was more fulsome. Near the beginning of the eighteenth century, commentary often "glorified the merchant as the republican archetype" in ways that were still difficult in other polities.⁴

¹ Quoted in Wolfgang Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend: Die Aufklärung im Spiegel der deutschen Moralischen Wochenschriften* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971), 305.

² *De Nederlandsche Spectator*, no. 218 (1757), quoted in Wijnand M. Mijnhardt, "The Dutch Enlightenment: Humanism, Nationalism, and Decline," in Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (eds.), *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 210.

³ *Der Bewunderer* [Hamburg], 1742, Vorrede. Quoted in Martens, *Botschaft*, 305.

⁴ In France, for example, not before the end of the seventeenth century (and probably even later) did people come to believe that the merchant could "place the public welfare before private interest." John Shovlin, *Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 18–19. Moreover, tensions between

Positive valuations of mercantile virtues lay almost at the very heart of their self-understanding.

This recognition meant that economics and politics were never divorced from one another – the good *homo economicus* was the good *homo civicus*. It indicated equally that economic improprieties assumed greater political moment than elsewhere. Here, the nerve fibers connecting politics to the economy were shorter and vibrated more intensely than in other polities. In each city, merchants assumed important civic and political positions; contemporaries and later commentators as well elevated them as moral exemplars of civic virtue, building them into pillars of their communities. Observers regarded their commitment to, and participation in, civic and political affairs as a necessity for the preservation of the peace, prosperity, and good order of their polities, in short, as vital to the preservation of each republic. The *Netherlandisch Spectator* equated the merchant with “a respectable burgher,” one who had achieved prosperity “through his own perspicacity and discretion” and his “intimate knowledge” of the ins and outs of commerce.⁵

As critical as mercantile virtues were to the *economic* well-being of the polity, those same features were politically essential as well. The fictive letter of a visitor to Hamburg, printed in *The Patriot*, made this clear. After praising “the advantageous location of the city, the strength of its fortifications, the number of its inhabitants, the splendor of its houses, the mildness of its government, and the freedom of its people,” the correspondent went on to connect all of this to the numerous merchants who were “very sensible, honest men” and apotheosized them as the very bastions of urban well-being. They stimulated “diligence and innovation” and ensured that “money, the lifeblood of the republic, flowed through the veins of all.” The entire society profited from their presence. In short, as they “promote their own well-being, they sustain that of the republic, which was simultaneously theirs.”⁶

This orientation hardly represents a simple-minded equation of “what’s good for business is good for us all.” Rather, excellent citizens – like the fictional Pasiteles described in [Chapter 4](#) – possessed the ability to achieve financial security through good mercantile practices that functioned best within the framework of a free republic and that, in turn, flexed the muscles of civic republicanism. The two were symbiotic. The good merchant shouldered the burdens of administration, philanthropy, and parish that involved neighborhoods and friends in an expanded sense; he provided all the effective force that assured

mercantile pursuits and republicanism, or between mercantile pursuits and the achievement of the public good remained, if increasingly in an attenuated form, well into the eighteenth century. Junko Thérèse Takeda, *Between Crown & Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 1–6; Amalia D. Kessler, *A Revolution in Commerce: The Parisian Merchant Court and the Rise of Commercial Society in Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 3–4, 160–1.

⁵ *Nederlandsche Spectator*, no. 3 (3 September 1731); 17–18; no. 154 (17 April 1733): 25.

⁶ *Der Patriot*, no. 6 (10 February 1724): 42–9.

the well-being of the whole. Money and humanity, economic striving and civic responsibility, profit and generosity may rarely seem to mix well, but many argued that a very harmonious combination of these distinguished the merchant republics. When greed and self-interest got the upper hand, however, then the republic's foundations shook and the resultant shock waves endangered *both* the economy and the government. Nonetheless, balancing the drive to acquire with the demands of the common good often proved a difficult task.

If the ideal characteristics of good business were clear enough, what was the reality? In short, how was a merchant to act, what were business ethics to be, and how should they be upheld, policed, and infractions punished? What was the link, indeed was there a link, between economic dishonesty and political malfeasance? Prescriptive literature offers clues to expectations, but even more important weigh the actualities that pertained in each merchant republic as ideals and realities merged but also diverged. The questions remain: *how* was business to be done and how *was* it done?

Doing business in the long eighteenth century

The economic history of the long eighteenth century in Europe has attracted numerous historians and, over the last decade and a half, several works have revised once-standard interpretations of what economic development and modernity meant.⁷ Chapter 1 reviewed the macroeconomic history of all three cities from roughly 1500 through the end of the eighteenth century. There is no need to repeat that survey here. Rather, this section addresses three rather different issues. First, it investigates how business was done in the long eighteenth century in the merchant republics. Second, it examines the evolution of what may be called business ethics, or more accurately, investigates what people considered *proper* business practices. Finally, it analyzes the breakdowns, where, when, and how business deals went wrong and what was done to correct or forestall those problems, as well as the political implications they evoked. In all three instances, fabrications and facts overlay each other so densely and entwined so tightly that it often proves extremely difficult to perceive where one left off and the other began. Not only is it probably impossible to scrape through the myths and fictions to reach the reality, it is also counterproductive. Each generation wove its own stories or reworked them to fit the times; yet

⁷ For example, Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially their review of the historiography as it pertains to the modernity of the Dutch economy, 1–4, and their conclusions, 711–22; Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Clé Lesger, *The Rise of the Amsterdam Market and Information Exchange: Merchants, Commercial Expansion and Change in the Spatial Economy of the Low Countries, c.1550–1630* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006).

especially the ones constructed in the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have held on most tenaciously.

One hundred and fifty years is a long time and the economic fortunes of these three cities altered, sometimes dramatically, over its course. Antwerp languished in past but by no means forgotten glory; Amsterdam rose to the dizzying top of the economic pile and then, by the middle of the eighteenth century, began a long slow slide down into an economic rut; Hamburg, prosperous in the sixteenth century but by no means as glorious or puissant as either the Dutch or Flemish metropolises in their salad days, had already by the middle of the seventeenth century embarked on an economic ascent that became meteoric in the late eighteenth century. None of these trends (as economists and economic historians refer to them) was unbroken, neither rise nor fall, prosperity nor decline. Spikes of change jaggedly split smooth planes of continuity. Not surprisingly, however, macroeconomic shifts affected how business proceeded in each city; not all were alike nor did they occur simultaneously or necessarily follow the same pathways. Just as obviously, how business was done, or how contemporaries perceived that business *should* be done, shifted as well; here, too, we observe a sometimes quite complex pattern of continuity and change. To get this right, that is, to understand the depth of the metamorphoses and the formative impact they exerted on the political economy of each city, we need to divest ourselves of the idea that anything like a traditional business practice, or mentality for that matter, existed. Equally one should jettison, or at least apply warily, the intellectual baggage of descriptors like “stagnant,” “lack of innovation,” and “tried and true methods.”⁸ It was not only contemporaries who thought in those terms; generations of historians, too, have documented decline, graphed economic troughs, and attributed their occurrences to new, corrupt, or dubious business tactics that evolved over time and that greatly increased, or seemed to increase, risk.

Risk is, of course, a slippery concept and little consensus at any time exists about what exactly is risky business and what is not. The management of risk presents even trickier issues, of which the lack of reliable information appears only the most obvious.⁹ Of course, as economic historians quickly

⁸ For two persuasive correctives to this point of view, see De Vries and Van der Woude, *First and Lesger, Rise*.

⁹ Most work on the evaluation of risk has been done in respect to insurance. See, for example, the various articles in Geoffrey W. Clark, Gregory Anderson, Christian Thomann, and J.-Matthias van Schuleberg (eds.), *The Appeal of Insurance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) and especially Eve Rosenhaft, “How to Tame Chance: Evolving Languages of Risk, Trust and Expertise in 18th-century German Proto-Insurances,” 16–42. Jonathan Levy has recently assessed the issue of risk in early industrial America: *Freaks of Fortune: The Merging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 5. What he observes for early nineteenth-century America, that “the thread that runs most consistently through risk’s history is a moral one,” is equally true for the merchant republics during the long eighteenth century.

point out “in economic life everyone is . . . running risks all the time.” Inherent in economic enterprise is assessing the “matter of particular risks, namely, the risks peculiar to creative optional choices between change and continuity, adaptation and originality, tradition and innovation.”¹⁰ Contemporary *gens d'affaires* recognized these dilemmas and articulated them cogently.

Early modern moralists conjured up economic bugbears in the shapes of usury, speculation, dubious business practices, and malicious bankruptcies. These scare-figures have never quite disappeared from economic history. To take one quick and easy example: few historians have viewed without a priori negative judgments the tendency for active traders (good for business and the political economy) to become passive rentiers (bad for both). The rhetoric of decay and decline, or of crisis, often insinuated itself into moralistic judgments and the amount of rhetoric produced quite overwhelms.¹¹ Nonetheless, a parallel discourse, perhaps even a counter-discourse, also existed and expressed considerably less hostility to risky business. By the mid eighteenth century, and perhaps even before, this rhetoric merged with a growing sense that unsound or dicey business practices did not engender economic crises, rather structural changes in the economic world with which merchants and governors had not yet learned to cope, did. This perception never denied that some businesses rested on unsound principles or were under-capitalized, nor does it insist that all business failures resulted from seismic upheavals in macroeconomic structures. Crooked businessmen abounded as well as men who sadly lacked economic acumen and sound mercantile instincts. To separate one from the other requires, however, a detailed study of individual cases that has only been done for a certain percentage of firms in the merchant republics. Many of these investigations are now quite old, but a number of more recent studies probe just these issues. Combined, they permit a preliminary estimation of actual business practices and of how individual firms and merchants fitted themselves into broader economic trends or helped create them.¹²

¹⁰ Peter W. Klein and Jan W. Veluwenkamp, “The Role of the Entrepreneur in the Economic Expansion of the Dutch Republic,” in Karel Davids and Leo Noordegraaf (eds.), *The Dutch Economy in the Golden Age: Nine Studies* (Amsterdam: NEHA, 1993), 28.

¹¹ Hajo Brugmans’s observation at the beginning of the twentieth century is perceptive about all the spectators, pointing out that moralists have expressed in them “their right to complain in all tones about the moral decline of their contemporaries.” “De Koopman: Mercurius als Spectator,” *Jaarboek der Vereniging Amstelodamum* 10 (1912): 100.

¹² Stuart Jenks, for example, comments that “comparatively little is known about how individual Hanseatic merchants financed their trade.” Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz and Stuart Jenks, *The Hanse in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 267–8. Thomas Max Safley notes that “[h]istorians need to turn their attention to microhistorical patterns of business organization and practice in order to determine their macrohistorical influence on business and economy in the past.” “Business Failure and Civil Scandal in Early Modern Europe,” *BHR* 83 (2009): 60. See also, Safley, “Introduction: A History of Bankruptcy and Bankruptcy in History,” in Safley (ed.), *The History of Bankruptcy: Economic, Social and Cultural Implications in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1–16.

The economic and business history of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg roughly approximates, yet also diverges rather strikingly, from more general histories of business and economics in the early modern world. While it is not quite true that business in all three cities meant commerce and, increasingly, commerce on a worldwide scale (and this also holds true for Antwerp, despite the obvious problems it faced in that competition), it nonetheless largely set the tone for all three political economies. Commerce, trans-shipping, and long-distance trade characterized each. So, too, if in varying degrees, did production for the urban market, retailing, and manufacturing for export. Much artisanal work, such as cooperage, carpentry, and shipbuilding, as well as transportation of all kinds, interlocked with commerce. Of great and growing importance for each city in the long eighteenth century was its function as a money market, as a center of banking, and a source of capital. While contemporaries and historians have noted the migration of merchants out of active business and into coupon-clipping, in none of these cities could the trend be labeled dominant and it has been exaggerated for all. Active trade, merchant banking, speculation in funds, and stockjobbing entwined in many business ventures and, as a whole, the last three bore increasing weight in all three cities over the course of time.

In some ways, the history of doing business in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg tracks the development of what many business historians and economists consider “modern business practices.” The accepted story for the evolution of the Dutch economy, while it cannot be applied in all its details or in blanket form to Antwerp and Hamburg, argues that “well-established traditions and recent innovations” created “a comprehensive infrastructure of semi-private and semi-public provisions” that promoted commerce and “moulded the framework for the development of early modern capitalist institutions and practices such as brokerage, joint-stock enterprise, banking, insurance and speculative financial trading.”¹³

The rest of a fairly traditional narrative runs basically something like this. Firms in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and to a good deal in the eighteenth century as well, generally remained family enterprises, controlled by the head of the family, male or female. They generally drew their capital from family resources. If additional investments were needed, they usually sought it from third parties who received fixed interest on their share in the undertaking. Associations of non-related businessmen and businesswomen were generally set up for short terms and to accomplish a specific objective; typically they then dissolved. Firms tended to remain all-arounders and dealt with various and sundry merchandises and enterprises, although a degree of rough-and-ready specialization also existed. While some family businesses persisted over generations, most had a much shorter lifespan. Demographic factors took their toll; family scions failed to attain maturity or did not develop desirable financial and business perspicacity thus leading to stagnation or even ruin. Advantageous

¹³ Klein, “Role of the Entrepreneur,” 46.

marriages could breathe new life into languishing businesses, but others could saddle thriving firms with improvident relatives. Reliance on family funds also meant that inheritance claims had to be satisfied from business capital and could significantly deplete monetary resources, to say nothing of generating Jarndycean litigation.

Family firms always remained numerous and influential, but new types of businesses developed alongside them. In the early seventeenth century, the Dutch created the first colonial companies and, although these would soon grow into broad-based commercial enterprises, they began as temporary arrangements. The establishment of these companies marked a major economic and business innovation, allowing the participation of “thousands of shareholders of the most diverse social origins.”¹⁴ These joint-stock companies presented several advantages as well as altering the way in which business proceeded. One clear advantage to the investor or principal was the sharing out of risk. Such limited liability greatly facilitated the mobilization of capital and the extension of credit. The later creation of anonymous companies, like the various Indies ones, further distributed risk over an even larger number of participants. The insurance mechanisms that developed especially in the eighteenth century served the same purpose of reducing liability.¹⁵

Business in Amsterdam and Hamburg, and even in Antwerp, meant to a large extent commerce, especially from trans-shipping (*tussenhandel* or *Zwischenhandel*), which remained strong even when other trade slowed. The continued blockage of the Scheldt constricted but did not terminate Antwerp’s ability to participate in these world ventures; indeed the city became a capital source sustaining them. Equally important, all functioned as information centers. Merchants brokered deals that stretched over the entire European continent and that eventually crossed the globe. In this economic environment, the ability to decrease risk, muster capital, and move money became vital.¹⁶

¹⁴ Menno Witteveen, *Een onderneming van landsbelang: De oprichting van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in 1602* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002); Michael Morineau, *Les grandes compagnies des Indes orientales: XVIe-XIXe siècles* (2nd rev. edn.; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999); Jan A. van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800–1800* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 208 (quote). On the difference between earlier companies and those like the East India Company, Simon van Brakel, *De Hollandsche handelscompagnieën der zeventiende eeuw: Hun ontstaan – hunne inrichting* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1908), xxix–xxxiii; on “anonymous companies,” Van Brakel, *Hollandsche handelscompagnieën*, 122–9.

¹⁵ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), xv; F. J. Fischer, “Some Experiments in Company Organization in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *EHR* 4, 2 (1933): 177–94; Clark *et al.*, *Appeal*; Sabine C. P. J. Go, “The Amsterdam Chamber of Insurance and Average: A New Phase in Formal Contract Enforcement (Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries),” *Enterprise and Society* 14 (2013): 518, 520, 535.

¹⁶ Clé Lesger, “Vertraagde groei: De economie tussen 1650 en 1700,” in Frijhoff/Prak-2, 31, 37; Franklin Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte der Aufklärung in Hamburg und Altona* (2nd edn.; Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1990), 178–85; Hans Mauersberg, *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte zentraleuropäischer Städte in neuerer Zeit: Dargestellt an*

Perhaps the most pronounced changes generally perceived as typifying business in these cities during these centuries are intimately linked: the putative retreat from active trading, creating a rentier group or a class of professional governors most clearly typified by the Dutch regents, and, as another common denominator, the simultaneous rise of merchant banking and a vast money market. Amsterdam's legendary bank, established in 1609, held unimaginable wealth or so most contemporaries believed; yet it constituted only the most obvious marker of this trend. All three cities became and remained financial centers. Even Antwerp, although cast down from the pinnacle of economic power, continued to serve as a major market for capital and credit. The private bankers – the famous cashiers of Amsterdam, for example – developed commercial credit through a policy of acceptances; that is, cashiers “allowed their clients to draw bills of exchange on them, without immediate cover, and guaranteed payment with their signature.”¹⁷

Although one can, therefore, trace out the general trends in business and commerce that scholars have usually pinpointed as turning points in economic developments or, for that matter, steps on the road to economic modernity, this picture gives us a little too much of the forest at the expense of the trees. In short, while the big picture is accurate enough and the overall story is hardly wrong, it remains too pat and too teleological. It would be silly to deny that a certain revolution in business occurred (or at least a major shift in its organization) and was especially pronounced in the world of finance. Nonetheless, one must also recognize that the winds of change did not sweep everyone along and that new methods and older practices mixed. The reverse also holds; some financial and economic techniques and mechanisms regarded as new, different, and often pernicious, prove by no means as novel as they first appear. Several scholars have cautioned against dividing economic history into premodern and modern phases, arguing, for instance, that such dichotomies create “a false history in which what is actually an extremely general contrast *within* cultures between the domains of the long and short-term orders becomes a contrast *between* cultures – and it is on this basis that the notion of a ‘great divide’ between the monetary and the pre-monetary worlds has rested.”¹⁸

One needs, therefore, to anchor a putatively disastrous withdrawal from active trade firmly within this framework of change and reorganization. If many merchants retreated or retired from active trade, or devoted themselves solely, or almost so, to the money business, a goodly number continued to retain

den Beispielen von Basel, Frankfurt a. M., Hamburg, Hannover und München (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960); Antwerpen, 17de; Antwerpen, 18de; Houtte, *Economic History*.

¹⁷ Houtte, *Economic History*, 303–4.

¹⁸ Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch, “Introduction,” in Parry and Bloch (eds.), *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 29. The work of Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Norton [1954], 1967), suggests something similar; the persistence of exchange and the importance of gifts in modern society as well as archaic ones.

diversified portfolios, so to speak. The Berenberg company in late eighteenth-century Hamburg, for example, originated as a family firm that Paul und Johann Berenberg established in 1763. When Paul died, and Johann's son-in-law, Johann Hinrich Goßler, became a partner, the firm transformed into Joh. Berenberg & Goßler, and – atypically – stood for seven generations. Berenberg & Co. undoubtedly drew its greatest strength from its activity as a merchant bank, but it also conducted a commodity trade that floated along the European littoral from the Levant to Archangel, offered insurance, owned shares in ships (another risk-reducing measure), ran a wax bleaching factory, involved itself in the blubber trade from Greenland, and then in the 1790s, developed a large exchange with the Americas and especially the infant United States. The story of John Parish in Hamburg at approximately the same time, of the Hopes in Amsterdam, and of the Prolis in Antwerp reveal similar commercial and financial permutations, as did even earlier enterprises such as those of the extremely wealthy Trip family in Amsterdam.¹⁹

Lesser firms, too, mixed a variety of business ventures. Cornelis Ploos van Amstel (1726–98) was apprenticed to a lumber dealer, then moved into a partnership with three other merchants, capitalized his brother's type foundry, and invested modestly in both the East and West India Companies. Ploos purchased interests in sawmills, bought and sold property (houses and mills), auctioned art, and also dabbled in securities (*waardepapieren*).²⁰

By the eighteenth century the Prolis in Antwerp had become considerable *koopmannen ter hore*, that is, merchant bankers. The progenitor of the Antwerp Prolis, Pietro (1671–1733), had been born in Milan but came to Antwerp in the early 1680s with his father. His early fortune rested on his extensive activities as merchant and banker alike. By the early eighteenth century, he had also become a *staatsbankier*, that is, he procured substantial funds for several governments, including, in 1718, for the Estates General of the Dutch Republic and then, later, the Austrian Habsburgs. He also became a director of the Ostend Company. Despite his fabulous wealth, Pietro had something of a questionable reputation in Antwerp both because of the high

¹⁹ On Berenberg, see Percy E. Schramm, *Neun Generationen: Dreihundert Jahre deutscher "Kulturgeschichte" im Lichte der Schicksale einer Hamburger Bürgerfamilie (1648–1948)* (2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963–6), 1: 260–2; on Parish, Richard Ehrenberg, *Das Haus Parish in Hamburg* (2nd edn.; Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1925) and Mary Lindemann, "The Anxious Merchant, the Bold Speculator, and the Malicious Bankrupt: Doing Business in Eighteenth-Century Hamburg," in Margaret Jacob and Catherine Secretan (eds.) *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 161–82; on Hope, Marten G. Buist, *At spes non fracta: Hope & Co. 1770–1815: Merchant Bankers and Diplomats at Work* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974); on Proli, Floris Prims, "De Asiatische Compagnie," *Antwerpiensia* 3 (1929): 172–80; Prims, 9: 119–20; and on Trip, Hindrik J. Trip, *De familie Trip* (Groningen: H. J. Trip, 1883).

²⁰ G. Ploos van Amstel, *Portret van een koopman en uitvinder: Cornelis Ploos van Amstel, maatschappelijk, cultureel en familieleven van een achttiende-eeuwer* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1980), 11, 66–101.

interest he charged on loans as well as his involvement in the minting of false French gold pieces. The future fate of the Proli merchants concerns us later, in [Chapter 6](#) on bankruptcy; the insolvency of his son created an economic *cause célèbre* in 1773. The Proli family fortunes therefore illustrate one strand of the eighteenth-century economic world, the one that combined trade and merchant banking. The firm moved perhaps more rapidly into banking and away from a commodity trade than did similar houses in either Amsterdam or Hamburg, but that decision can perhaps be attributed to the different, and less favorable, climate for active trade that existed in Antwerp. The confluence of trade and banking or merchant banking, however, remained a red thread in the bigger European-wide weave of business evolutions.²¹

Antwerp over the long eighteenth century projected a double image of commerce and the money trade. Firms like the Proli, Pret, De Groot, and Della Faille “seized all the possibilities offered by ‘la technique commerciale’ in order to promote [their businesses] in far off lands.” Alongside these, however, existed many others “infinitely more modest,” such as that of Jean-Baptiste Borrekens who dealt almost exclusively in cloth from German territories; his business was limited yet dependable.²²

We should, therefore, not exaggerate the dimensions of alterations in the business world of the long eighteenth century, or their rapidity and extent, because much continued without great modification especially, but hardly exclusively, in places and in branches that either did not grow at all or declined. It would, however, be equally naive to believe that nothing changed and that these discontinuities provoked no uneasiness. What has been described for France as a “revolution in commerce” also brought with it a “crisis in virtue” that hinged on quite substantial innovations and the perceptions of them as disruptive and virtually ubiquitous.²³

Contemporaries commented frequently on the introduction of these seemingly new methods generally, if not inevitably, negatively. The practices they singled out for criticism never counted as entirely novel, even if the emphasis on them, or their prevalence, had grown. In the long eighteenth century, contemporaries generally identified the greatest mercantile dangers to be inherent in speculation and bankruptcy, both intimately tied, of course, to issues of risk in business. Only at the very beginning of the period did the old mercantile vice of usury remain a real cognitive issue and enable easy association between usury and bankruptcy; Shylock was, so to speak, quickly embraced.²⁴ Neither

²¹ Karel Degryse, *De Antwerpse fortuinen: Kapitaalsaccumulatie, -investeren en – rendement te Antwerpen in de 18de eeuw* (Antwerp: Universiteit Antwerpen, Centrum voor Stadsgeschiedenis, 2005; Special issue of *BTG*), 141–2.

²² Wilfrid Brulez, “Anvers de 1585 à 1650,” *VSWG* 54 (1967): 82–4.

²³ Kessler, *Revolution*, 188–237.

²⁴ For example, *Der Wucherer oder Poëtisches Portrait eines gewinnsüchtigen Wucherers...* (Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Berlin: n.p., 1638) argued that “[charging] usurious rates [of interest] often creates many bankruptcies” (3). Charles R. Geist in a chapter on “Embracing

speculation nor bankruptcy was new, of course, in the eighteenth century, although it seemed to contemporaries that both had become ever more common and pressing problems. The tendency toward moralistic hand-wringing over these new-wrought economic vices, as well as the continued dialog on the virtues or vices of luxury and consumerism, burgeoned during the eighteenth century. If these problems, too, were not new ones, there is a case, and a fairly strong one, to be made for the greater prevalence and visibility of speculative commercial and financial ventures and of bankruptcies that occurred in cascades; the late seventeenth and eighteenth century experienced both in seemingly greater measure than ever before.

Instruments of credit and the money trade

In accounting for the changes that had, apparently, deeply altered the world of business over the course of the long eighteenth century, contemporaries identified the financial tools merchants had developed and used with ever-increasing frequency; some were innovative and some were older techniques refurbished and polished up to cope with evolving economic situations. Nothing in this mercantile environment assumed greater weight than credit in the double sense of mobilizing capital and of reputation. The relationship between credit (in monetary terms) and credit/reputation remained close and intense; it reached far beyond the doors of the counting house. The whole basis of what may be called a “culture of credit” rested on the fact that “more than anything credit was a public means of social communication and circulating judgement about the value of other members of communities.”²⁵

John Brewer has remarked that “credit was everywhere” in the eighteenth century. Economic historians have generally assessed the expansion of credit and credit-generating facilities as positive economic trends. Credit, however, also cast a darker shadow and the liabilities attached to credit in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries always made it a somewhat treacherous activity for everyone concerned, principally because credit was “bound hand and foot to risk-taking and speculation.”²⁶ It could fashion an often nightmarish reality

Shylock” points out that “while attitudes toward excessive interest remained remarkably constant through the late Middle Ages, they nevertheless were being paid lip service while business continued to expand.” Usury was widely practiced, if almost universally condemned, thus presenting “one of the great cultural paradoxes of the ancient and medieval worlds.” *Beggar Thy Neighbor: A History of Usury and Debt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 59.

²⁵ Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 2.

²⁶ Julian Hoppit, “The Use and Abuse of Credit in Eighteenth Century England,” in Neil McKendrick and R. B. Outhwaite (eds.), *Business Life and Public Policy: Essays in Honour of D. C. Coleman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 65, 78; Brewer, *Sineus*, 186.

for debtors and creditors alike. The political arithmetician, Charles Davenant, warned that

Of all beings that have existence only in the minds of men, nothing is more fantastical and nice than Credit; it is never to be forced; it hangs upon opinion; it depends upon our passions of hope and fear; it comes many times unsought for, and often goes away without reasons, and when once lost, is hardly to be quite recovered.²⁷

One might think he was speaking of a man's reputation which, of course, he was. The Antwerp merchant, Jan de Coninck, wrote in 1675 that credit "is like a chaste woman who must be handled gingerly."²⁸ Advancing credit, seeking credit, and dealing with credit gone bad tangled commercial, social, and personal relationships and complicated the dilemmas accompanying the judgment of risk.²⁹

Credit not only capitalized business and commercial ventures, it also facilitated the movement of goods and monetary transactions over distances. In a world still fractured and separated by geography, the economy remained one

Brewer's work is now more than twenty-five years old, yet remains a milepost in economic history. It emphasizes in particular the importance of credit relations, tax revenues, and sound financing for creating a strong national state, explaining how the English state achieved greatness through its competent government and public financing while other countries lagged behind in the development of both public finances and credit. Lisa Jardine suggests that the English were basically following the Dutch model in *Going Dutch: How England Plundered Holland's Glory* (New York: Harper, 2008). In a more scholarly vein, D. W. Jones argues much the same thing in "Sequel to Revolution: The Economics of England's Emergence as a Great Power, 1688–1712," in Jonathan I. Israel (ed.), *The Anglo-Dutch Moment: Essays on the Glorious Revolution and Its World Impact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 389–406. Significant work since then has maintained that the French, for example, followed a different model but that many credit and credit-mechanisms were created from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards. See, for example, Philip T. Hoffman, Gilles Postel-Vinay, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, *Priceless Markets: The Political Economy of Credit in Paris, 1660–1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). They argued that "the very abundance of credit throughout France (and especially in Paris)" suggested that the financial histories of France and England possessed perhaps more in common than often assumed. Thus, they explain that the "very substantive financial divergence between England and France" occurred only after the bursting of the 1720s speculative bubbles when each developed different credit mechanisms. "Britain had one debt instrument . . . which was publicly traded, and France had a variety of instruments, few of which were publicly traded." But credit in abundance there was (289).

²⁷ Hoppit, "Use and Abuse," 78 (Davenant quote).

²⁸ Quoted in John Everaert, *De Internationale en koloniale handel der Vlaamse firma's te Cádiz, 1670–1700* (Brugges: De Tempel, 1973), 550.

²⁹ See, for instance, several essays in Jürgen Schlumbohm (ed.), *Soziale Praxis des Kredits, 16.–20. Jahrhundert* (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2006); Carola Lipp, "Aspekte der mikrohistorischen und kulturanthropologischen Kreditforschung," 15–36; Mark Häberlein, "Kreditbeziehungen und Kapitalmärkte vom 16. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert," 37–52; Beate Sturm, "'Borg macht Sorg': Schuldkonflikte im frühneuzeitlichen Hannover," 53–80; also Rosenhaft, "How to Tame Chance."

“where delivery times were bound to be uncertain and prolonged.”³⁰ Many business deals, large, medium, and small, proceeded through the giving and taking of commissions and they thus required multiple, often anonymous, extensions of credit and trust. These deals presented serious difficulties that we would today call cash-flow problems. Buying and selling at distance required the buyer to have a trusted representative to purchase goods for him, or have goods purchased, sending him a bill of exchange to pay for the transactions, while raising the money at home. Obviously much room existed here for delay, procrastination, and outright deceit, all facilitated by the exigencies of distance.³¹

Such deals, therefore, frequently went wrong, resulting in momentary or longer-term financial embarrassment. The case of the suspected malicious bankrupt, Paul Trummer, in Hamburg in the 1750s, illustrates the dilemmas a merchant encountered; here, in the Silesian linen trade. In his defense, Trummer referred to cash-flow difficulties to explain some rather dubious mercantile ventures. His creditors accused him of selling goods that he had received in commission and then pocketing the money. In one case (and there were several instances), Trummer sold material he had on commission in order to cover payments – some 16,000 marks – due him from Cadiz. Similarly, he put another set of commissioned goods on the market to stave off other creditors. Trummer, quite truthfully, or at least plausibly, pointed out that it was very common to acquire cloth woven in Silesia on commission, hold it for three months or more, waiting for a higher price or a more advantageous opportunity. He quickly added that he had over the years concluded many such agreements with his creditors in Silesia with whom he usually did about 10,000 marks annually in trade.³² We will encounter Trummer again when we turn to the subject of malicious bankruptcy, but for now it is enough to note from his example how frequent commission deals were and how they required the use of common financial tools. In Trummer’s case, the instrument of credit he had availed himself of was the bill (or letter) of exchange. He was hardly unusual and deals based on such bills, especially in international trade, often stretched over several months. The normal due deadline (*verfaltermijn*) for such a transaction between Spain and Antwerp was, for example, sixty days.³³

Bills of exchange – *wissel*, *wisselbrieven*, or *Wechsel* – were nothing new in either the seventeenth or the eighteenth century. Historians have generally traced the invention of such bills to late medieval Italian bankers, but apparently

³⁰ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Fortuna Press, 1991 [1987]), 350 (quote); on the same topics, see De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 150–1.

³¹ Wilfrid Brulez, in his excellent study of the Della Faille firm in the sixteenth century, vividly describes just how this worked. *De Firma della Faille en de internationale handel van vlaamse firma's in de 16e eeuw* (Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie, 1959), 370.

³² “Arrestati Paul Hermann Trummers Examen in pto. seines Fallissements,” 14 May and 21 July 1756, in StAHbg, Senat Cl. VII Lit. Me Nr. 4b.

³³ Everaert, *Handel*, 549.

new uses for such bills developed independently among the merchants and financiers of sixteenth-century Antwerp and London where they accelerated the flow of commercial credit and enabled the more rapid handling of business deals across national and even continental borders. Used principally as “a means of payment during the Late Middle Ages,” bills of exchange became “a form of credit in the seventeenth century” when almost all large northern European firms used bills of exchange to transact business, expedite trade, and make money. The van Colen Company in Antwerp, for example, routinely employed bills for all three purposes. Bills additionally nourished practices considered speculative, although by no means all firms ventured into speculation with funds.³⁴

Bills of exchange were then, and still are, negotiable instruments. A bill of exchange is an order in writing that one person addresses to another. The person giving it (the drawer) signs it. The bill of exchange requires the addressee (the drawee) to pay on demand or at fixed future time a pre-determined sum to the bearer who is not necessarily either the drawer or drawee. Today one most often associates bills of exchange with international trade. While they developed in the early modern world to expedite long-distance trade, they could be, and were, used in domestic deals as well. Before the advent of paper money, bills often functioned as a common means of exchange, almost like currency or modern checks.³⁵

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works on commerce and business devoted many pages to discussing bills of exchange. Jacques Savary's *The Perfect Merchant* was not the first book to address the subject, but it had considerable impact and enjoyed a long publishing history in several languages, including German, Dutch, and English. Paul Marperger's equally popular *Merchants Exchange* (German edition, 1704) reworked Savary.³⁶ Savary's

³⁴ Herman van der Wee, “Anvers et les innovations de la technique financière aux XVIe en XVII siècles,” *Annales* 22 (1967): 1067–89; Cátia Antunes, *Globalisation in the Early Modern Period: The Economic Relationship between Amsterdam and Lisbon, 1640–1705* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2004), 118–21, quote 118; Roland Baetens, “Een Antwerps handelshuis uit de XVII eeuw: De firma van Colen,” *TVG* 73 (1960): 204–6.

³⁵ James Steve Rogers, *The Early History of the Law of Bills and Notes: A Study of the Anglo-American Commercial Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 94–9.

³⁶ Jacques Savary's handbook first appeared in 1675. Its full title was: *Le parfait negociant; ou, Instruction générale pour ce qui regarde le commerce: de toute sorte de marchandises, tant de France, que des pays estrangers: pour le banque, le change & rechange; pour les societez ordinaires, en commandite, & anonymous; pour les faillites, banqueroutes, separations, cessions, & abandonnemens de biens; pour la maniere de tenir les livres journaux d'achats, de ventes, de caisse, & de raison: avec des formulaires de lettres & billets de change, d'inventaire, & de toutes sortes de societez; et l'application des ordonnances & arrests rendus sur toutes les questions les plus difficiles qui arrivent entre les marchands, negocians & banquiers, sur toutes sortes de matieres concernant le commerce* (Paris: J. Guignard, 1675). It was reprinted many times well into the late eighteenth century and also appeared (given here with shorter titles) in several European languages including English as *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*

definition reflects the everyday knowledge of a man who not only wrote about business but actually lived it; much as did the merchants of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. For him, as for them, a bill of exchange was

a piece of paper, commonly long and narrow, on which is wrote a short order, given by a banker, a merchant, or trader, for paying to such a person, or to his order, or also, in some countries, to the bearer in a distant place, a sum of money equivalent to that which such a banker, merchant, or trader has received in his dwelling-place.³⁷

The bill of exchange undoubtedly offered great convenience, but its possibilities for misuse, for abuse, and for downright fraud proved equally high. Besides the taint of usury that clung to bills, the myth that Jews had invented bills of exchange in the Middle Ages did even less to recommend them.³⁸ Even those with the best intentions, but perhaps with little knowledge, might go astray. Jan Phoonsen's *Methods of Exchange in Amsterdam* acknowledged the advantages of bills, but also offered pertinent advice to "a prudent merchant" on what he or she should know in order to preserve security in the handling of bills.³⁹ According to Phoonsen, if commerce was the "trunk-nerve of our land," then "the bill of exchange [is] the nerve center of commerce." Commerce in the late seventeenth century was unthinkable without bills. Nonetheless, it was a "delicate matter" that required concentration and application to penetrate its

(2 vols.; London: John Knapton, 1757); German as *Der vollkommene Kauff- und Handelsmann, oder, Allgemeiner Unterricht alles, was zum Gewerbe und Handlung allerhand beydes frantzösischer als ausländischer Kauffwaren gehört* . . . (Geneva: Johann Hermann Widerhold, 1676); and in Dutch, *De volmaakte koopman, zynde een naaukeurige onderrechting van alles wat den inlandschen en uitlandschen koophandel betreft* . . . (Amsterdam: Hieronymus Sweerts, Jan ten Hoorn, Han Bouman, and Daniel van den Dalen in compagnie, 1683). There were also numerous later editions in German (besides Marperger's reworking) and Dutch. Similar instructional manuals proliferated, often written to address commercial situations in particular places, for example Jürgen Elert Kruse's *Allgemeiner und besonders Hamburg Contorist* . . . (Hamburg: Verlag des Verfassers, 1753). See also Marperger, *Die Neu-Eröffnete Kauffmans-Börse: Worin eine vollkommene Connoissance aller zu der Handlung dienenden Sachen* . . . (Hamburg: Benjamin Schillern, 1704) and on Marperger, Peter Rupp, *Barocke "Handlungswissenschaft" als sozialgeschichtliche Quelle: Der Poeta Caesareus Kommerzienrat Marperger aus Nürnberg, ein "entsetzlicher Vielschreiber"* (Nuremberg: Zentralinstitut, 1979).

³⁷ Savary, *Universal Dictionary*, 1: 253. Examples of such long thin slips of papers and the way in which they were written out can be found in William Stevenson, *A Full and Practical Treatise upon Bills of Exchange: Together with an Account of the Nature of the Bank of Amsterdam, and how Payments are Made and Received in It, etc.* (Edinburgh: John Robertson, 1764), 44–7.

³⁸ Francesca Trivellato, "Credit, Honor, and the Early Modern French Legend of the Jewish Invention of Bills of Exchange," *JMH* 84 (2012): 289–334, esp. 290–3.

³⁹ Johannes Phoonsen, *Wissel-styl tot Amsterdam vervattende niet alleen betheven wat men gewoon, maar oock wat een voorsichtigh Koopman, tot zijn securiteyt, in de wissel-handel dienstigh en noodigh is, te observeren*. (Amsterdam: Andries van Damme and Joannes Ratelband, 1716); there exists a German edition from 1742.

“buried mysteries.” “The incautious use [of bills] by dabblers . . . causes endless confusion and conflict.” He likened a bill of exchange “in the hands of a novice” to the razor in the monkey’s paw.⁴⁰

Of course, people wield razors every day and usually only do a modicum of damage; thus, too, did bills of exchange become for the merchant as natural as shaving. Moreover, the technique of using bills to facilitate credit and to generate funds grew quite strikingly in these years and impressed itself on the popular imagination; such was, as Amalia Kessler argued for France, “readily apparent in the popular culture of the time.” Nonetheless, many merchants continued to make use of bills in a more traditional way – to pay for goods.⁴¹

Because of the growing utilization of bills, each city carefully regulated the ways they could be exchanged, endorsed, assigned, and discounted. In 1609, Amsterdam specified that all bills of more than *f*600 must be negotiated at the Bank. In July 1660, the Bank set the length of extensions at six days; thereafter bills could be protested, that is, the holder could demand their payment forthwith.⁴² Antwerp, too, systematized the trade in bills, referring to “various abuses and bad practices . . . in the acceptance of bills of exchange” and especially from “foreigners.”⁴³ Hamburg, in the early eighteenth century, deemed it necessary to specify a grace period, as well as how bills were to be accepted and protested.⁴⁴

Somewhat like twenty-first-century credit cards, bills of exchange proliferated rapidly. Bills circulated so freely (in some cases, virtually substituting for hard money) that owners frequently reported them missing or stolen. In 1656 in Antwerp, for instance, Jan la Gat advertised that he had “lost or mislaid a

⁴⁰ Unpaginated introduction [“De drukkers tot den lezer”] in *ibid.*

⁴¹ Kessler, *Revolution*, 201. In a careful study of the Della Faille family in the sixteenth century, Wilfrid Brulez came to the conclusion that although a firm like Della Faille frequently used bills of exchange in large numbers “nonetheless, it never had a significant speculative business” in bills. The vast majority of bills, about 90 percent, were used to pay for goods. *Firma Della Faille*, 394, 397–9. Whether that remained true in the eighteenth century is open to doubt. In commenting on developments in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Antwerp, Karel Degryse and John Everaert note that in sixteenth-century northwestern Europe the bill of exchange had replaced the letter of credit (*schuldbekentenis*). The “negotiability revolution” then proceeded in the early seventeenth century with the development of endorsement and discounting of bills of exchange. “De Handel,” in Antwerpen, 18de, 124.

⁴² Marjolein ’t Hart, “Freedom and Restrictions: State and Economy in the Dutch Republic, 1570–1670,” in Davids and Noordegraaf, *Dutch Economy*, 116. William Stevenson explained that “[a] protest is nothing else but a lawful summons, according to the custom of the place where a bill is payable, demanding the person upon whom it is drawn to accept the bill, or, if due, to pay the contents; and in case of refusal, the bearer must enter a protestation against all concerned, both for the principal sum, and all cost, damages and interest &c in order to preserve its right against the drawer.” *Full and Practical Treatise*, 118. Both Stevenson and Savary, *Le parfait négociant*, devoted considerable space to these matters. Everaert, *De internationale en koloniale handel*, 549.

⁴³ Resolution of Monday Council from 14 February 1667, quoted in Phoonsen, *Wissel-styl*, 29.

⁴⁴ “Ordnung von Wechsel und Wechselbrieffen,” Hamburg, n.d. quoted in *ibid.*, 114–18.

particular *obligatie* [in the amount of] *f*3000” and in 1705 a similar “Publicatie” informed the public to be on the lookout for a “first-class bill of exchange for 300 Pattacons . . . drawn on Bordeaux . . . by Cornelis Delfgamme on Jacques le Cerff, to the credit of Joseph Nuñes Pereira, and last endorsed to Alexandre Cocqueel.” Even in the late eighteenth century, when Antwerp’s significance as a mercantile center had faded and the city on the Scheldt ceded pride of place to London, Amsterdam, and Hamburg, several Antwerp financiers continued to provide funds and bills in huge amounts, often to underwrite military operations.⁴⁵

Several practices arose over the course of time to enhance further the utility of bills and to prevent their misapplication: assignment (in which note bearers transferred the bill to their own creditors for settlement); endorsement (to prevent fraud); and, later, bill discounting. The last particularly multiplied the uses of bills but also made it easier to misuse them. Bill discounting – a practice upon which imposters, frauds, cheats, and desperate men often relied, but which the perfectly respectable also used – lubricated the flow of commercial credit; when a bill was discounted it became negotiable. Bill discounting proves an excellent example of a financial instrumentality that, once outlawed, had, by the second quarter of the seventeenth century, become routine, especially in Amsterdam but not only there. Discounted bills could change hands many times. Being presented with a bill whose origin was obscure or distant became an unremarkable event and a normal commercial experience.⁴⁶

Bills of exchange thus offered, or seemed to offer, perfect opportunities for fraud; many viewed them as a way to stall creditors or even as the bankrupt’s favorite method of temporarily staving off disaster. Swindles in letters of credit and bills of exchange produced recurring scandals and some truly spectacular ones. George Landaens, a diamond-dealer in Antwerp, prepared at least five false bills in 1773 to forestall imminent bankruptcy. The notary, Eduard Tilbourg, had used his office to defraud several of his own clients with the same means and to the same end.⁴⁷ The East India Company, too, provided the framework for similar rackets. Moses Levÿ Flersheim in 1736, for

⁴⁵ From 24 July 1656, in FA, PK 2847; from 22 March 1705, FA, PK 2848. These are only two of many examples. See also “Berigt van eene negotiatie groot *f*3,600,000 wissel geld voor, rekening van . . . den Prins van Walles, den Hertog van York, ende den Hertog van Clarence, waer von *f*1,800,00 wisselgeld ten Comptoire van J. E. A. Werbouck,” published in English and Dutch (London: n.p., 1791); Degryse, *Fortuinen*, 146–52.

⁴⁶ Houtte, *Economic History*, 208–18; De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 130–1; Raymond De Roover, *L’Evolution de la lettre de change XIVe–XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1953); van der Wee, “Anvers et les innovations de la technique financière,” 1071–82; A bill was considered discounted “when there is less paid for the bill at the place where it is drawn than is to be paid at the place it falls due.” That is, when a third party agreed to purchase a bill before its due date, paying a cash sum which was less than the face value of the bill at maturity. Stevenson, *Full and Practical Treatise*, 18.

⁴⁷ FA, PK 2850; interrogations from 3 December 1779 and 14 September 1780 in FA, V 114, V 244, and V 1373.

example, falsified bills for goods drawn from the East India Company by forging the signature of a director from legitimate bills onto blank bill forms that he had fraudulently obtained from a complicit company employee. He admitted to filling out, at his best guess, about seventy such bills totaling some *f*100–120,000 over a course of about six to seven years.⁴⁸

Just how these early modern swindles worked can be difficult to discern, but Tilbourg's case offers some insight into how bills facilitated frauds and also provides information about those involved. These mercantile devices were by no means restricted to the realm of big-time merchants and high-rollers. Tilbourg practiced as a notary in Antwerp for over thirty years (from about 1745 to 1779).⁴⁹ The first indication of the difficulties in which he found himself comes from a proclamation in 1779 ordering him to appear (he had fled Antwerp) because he was "seriously suspected" of fraud and "other similar false practices... [thus] abusing public trust." One means by which he had "obtained capital resources from various persons" was by perverting the proper use of bills. The accusation detailed several methods he had used to extract money from others by "scandalously deceiving them." Tilbourg's catalog of crimes did not end with the use of false bills; we encountered him already in [Chapter 3](#) as a corrupt official. A notary, however, possessed perfect opportunities to betray the faith placed in a him as a drawer of bills or the executor of an estate.⁵⁰ According to the charge against him, "in 1771 the suspect was entrusted with the task of drawing up a bill in the sum of *f*1000. The person [commissioning the transaction] deposited with the suspect, as surety, an original obligation in the sum of 1820 German florins drawn on the bank of Vienna." Although Tilbourg obtained for his client the ready cash, he did not cover the original debt and thus "to [his client's] distress and detriment" kept the bill and used it to raise *f*2000 for himself.⁵¹

Although it occurred almost at the end of the eighteenth century, the story of Lefmann Samson Hertz, arrested and charged with the "preparation of false bills" in 1797, indicates how sensitive the topic became in those very difficult years. Commentators associated Hertz's wrongdoing, or the earlier scams involving the many false bills prepared by one Peter Krameyer and his accomplice Johann Engelbrecht from 1768 through 1780, with the forging and clipping of coins. Perhaps not surprisingly, as well, the Hertz case reignited all the old anti-Semitic feelings.⁵²

⁴⁸ Interrogations of 7 and 8 December, 1735, 28 March 1736, and Acta from 15 and 29 March 1736 in SA, inv. 5061, 6401.

⁴⁹ See his notary records in FA, N 4497–560.

⁵⁰ Statement of Joseph de Broeta, from 27 October 1779, concerning the estate of the widow Anna Jacobs Muytinx, in FA, V 114.

⁵¹ "Tight ende Conclusie... tegens Eduard van Tilborg, geproclameerden," from 3 December 1779, in FA, V 114.

⁵² Both the Hertz and Krameyer cases were handled under the rubric of "Crimen falsi" that also explicitly included counterfeiters. See StAHbg, Senat Cl. VII Lit. Me Nr. 5 vol. 5 (Krameyer

A far less dramatic instance, and for that reason probably more representative, involved an Italian living in Amsterdam in 1778; it illustrates as well the perceptual convergence of imposture with economic malfeasance. In fall 1778, a man “who called himself Pietro Regis” approached the principals of the firm Aaron de Jacob de Prado & Sons, “upright merchant-bankers in Amsterdam,” and offered them a bill worth f50,000, signed by David de Montel, merchant in Livorno. In some way that remained unclear to the authorities, Regis had managed to obtain false letters of recommendation delivered to the members of the firm that vouched for his identity and integrity. De Prado & Sons took the paper as a true bill and paid the sum to Regis, who was “clever enough” to represent himself as a dealer in diamonds. Thus his request to receive the sum in gems seemed quite reasonable. Once he got the jewels in his possession, he, of course, took to his heels.⁵³

Nothing illustrates the connections between mercantile fraud and larger social and civic concerns better, perhaps, than an incident that took place in early eighteenth-century Amsterdam. In 1734, the German-Jewish financier, Samson Salomons, declared bankruptcy and the authorities in Amsterdam confiscated his estate for distribution to his creditors. Salomons’s riches were new, he having grown wealthy in the speculative frenzies of the 1720s. Within a decade, however, he had fallen into a deep financial pit.⁵⁴ By 1732 many creditors were protesting his paper.

He then tumbled from one ignominy to another. He had involved himself in speculative business practices of perhaps dubious legality and allowed his bills to be caught up in a slimier scheme of fast-and-loose discounting and even fraud masterminded (or at least conducted) by a Jewish merchant named Aron Abrahamsz. (perhaps the same man who had earlier fled Antwerp). The story involved several accomplices and sundry financial dodges and cut-outs. What seems clear is that Abrahamsz. and his confederates had been busily altering Salomons’s bills of exchange or brokering them based on his reputation. They used equally underhanded means to cash them. Although the city prosecutor asked for the death penalty, Abrahamsz., then in his late sixties, was spared his

and Engelbrecht) and vol. 7 (Hertz). The Hertz case produced a range of pamphlets, both pro- and contra-Hertz. See, for example, *Unterthänigste Supplikation und Bitte . . . In Sachen des Schutz- und Handelsjuden Lesmann Samson Hertz wider Einen hochedlen Magistrate der Reichsstadt Hamburg* (Wetzlar: Heinrich Wilhelm Stock, 1799) and the response: *Getreue und aktenmäßige Darstellung des über den Juden Lefmann Samson Hertz in Hamburg wegen Wechselverfälschung verfügten Inquisitions-Prozesses: Ein Gegenstück zu der abseiten des Herzischen Anwaltes in Wetzlar in Druck gegebenen Supplica pro Mandato* (n.p. [Hamburg?]: n.p., 1800).

⁵³ Report in *NNJ*, 1778, part 2, 1277–8.

⁵⁴ SA, inv. 5061, 640k (1732); Carel C. G. Quarles van Ufford, “Het Mooiste tuinhuis van Amsterdam staat te Ukkel: De achttiende eeuwse bouwactiviteiten van Aron de Joseph de Pinto op Nieuw Herengracht 103,” *Amstelodamum* 65 (1973): 109–36; here, 122, 135.

life, but sentenced to be whipped, branded, and confined for thirty years in the city's prison.⁵⁵

Contemporaries viewed the practices Salomons used to stave off bankruptcy, and, of course, his final disastrous involvement with Abrahamsz., as equally pernicious to the commerce and credit of the city and its merchants. They were, moreover, cast as characteristically *Jewish* schemes.⁵⁶ The vein of anti-Semitism once opened poured forth vile commentaries not only on the Abrahamsz./Salomons case, but on the general deceitfulness of Jews and elided their financial crimes with the most detestable murders of the day. Spearheading the assault was a professional strewer of rancor, J. W. Claus van Laar. But he only sat atop a very large and smelly dung heap. Laar was an exceptionally busy scribbler and, between 1737 and 1740, published three thick volumes on the Abrahamsz. case – *The Deceiver Deceived, or the Yid in Prison*, *The Deceiver Punished*, and *The Deceiver's Death, or the Yid Deceased* and, encouraged by the rapid sale of the previous ones, a more general piece, *The Usurer Deceived, or the Yid in the Whorehouse*. One need not expound on details here: suffice it to say that Laar drew deeply on the common stock of European anti-Semitic stereotypes.⁵⁷

More interesting are Laar's political objectives and his position in the greater political debates of mid century. Laar later involved himself in the dispute surrounding Pieter Bakker and also in the Orangist uprising of 1747–8; his political position was already emerging in the *Deceiver* pamphlets. These pasquinades assumed the conventional form of a conversation among travelers, here, in typically Dutch fashion, in a canal-boat, not a carriage, on its way from Amsterdam to Haarlem. Talk turned to “marvelous events, and to the present-day world in general, and especially to contemplating the roguish tricks and knavish deceits that flourish among us.”

The lawyer who represented Laar's views catalogued the many crimes of smouses (the Dutch equivalent of “yid” or “kike”), of Abrahamsz. in particular and of Jewish merchants and financiers in general. He regaled his listeners with “true” stories, including a gratuitously lascivious account of how a Jewish whore seduced an innocent Christian youth of good family, guided

⁵⁵ SA, inv. 5061, 6401, series of interrogations beginning on 6 August 1736 and continuing intermittently until his sentencing on 10 January 1737; H. Bovenkerk, “Nederlandse schrijvers tijdens de Republiek over de Joden,” in Hajo Brugmanns and A. Frank (eds.), *Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland (tot circa 1795)* (Amsterdam: Van Holkema & Warendorf, 1940), 752–6.

⁵⁶ Stevenson, *Full and Practical Treatise*, 84–6.

⁵⁷ C. Lonius [=J.W. Claus van Laar], *Den bedrieger bedroogen, of Den gevangen smous [Aäron Abrams]; zynde een verhaal van zeer veele aanmerkelyke voorvallen; raakende het leeven en bedryf van een beruchten ryken gevangen smous. Doormengt, met veel ernstige en boertige aanmerkingen, en vermakelyke Geschiedenissen; daar onder, het beleegeren van de Stad Goes, op Sacraments; dag. enz. Boertende beschreven in zes t'samenspraaken* (Amsterdam: Pieter Aldewerelt, 1737) [the copy found in SA, Bibliotheek, is the fourth printing], 3.

him through an inspired range of sexual debaucheries, and finally – the ultimate crime – indoctrinated him in unscrupulous business practices. Laar then turned to other criminal cases and directly compared Abrahamsz. to two of the century's most notorious murderers, Helena Knoop and Hidde Grittinga, who in 1703 conspired to kill their respective spouses to facilitate their "illicit lusts."⁵⁸ Contemporaries apparently had little trouble connecting the murder of spouses and the falsification of bills. Not all cases of financial malversation evoked such distinctly nasty anti-Semitic tones. Nonetheless, such frauds had become tied to more general discussions about civic life and financial propriety. It was, therefore, hardly astounding that the word "money-changer" (*wisselaer*) became slang for thief.⁵⁹

The instances where contemporaries found it easy to associate bills of exchange with fraud and criminality, and to regard them as real threats to mercantile and civic integrity alike, were numerous. Time and again, individual instances, and the familiar faces associated with them, provoked the most voluminous commentary and greatest outrage. In 1660, Theodore van Perre attracted the attention of the Amsterdam criminal authorities. Prominent among his many crimes was "the duplication and signing of obligations with another man's hand" for a sum totaling f60,000. Perhaps even more impressive, was that he printed out fake forms and drew bills on the Admiralty "for very large sums" over fraudulent names and forged signatures that he then passed off on "honest people."⁶⁰ The indictment ticked off the very many times Van Perre had counterfeited letters of obligation as in the case of two sisters in 1664 from whom he swindled first f8500 and then f7000, deceptively securing the loans by placing in their hands two fake bills of f10,000 and f6000.⁶¹

⁵⁸ "Kees de Potsemaker of de Tabaks-Boer In het Rasphuis, Zynde een verhaal van het leeven en bedrijf; van Kees de grappemaker en bedrieger, om zyn menigvuldige boevestukken, openbaar gestraft. Doormengt met verscheide aanmerkelyke voorvallen. Vfyde t'zamenspraak, tusschen Een PREDIKANT; ADVOCAT; DOCTOR; RENTENIER en KOOPMAN," 250–326, in *Den Bedrieger Gestorven of Doode Smous*... (1740); on Grittinga and Knoop, see *Naamlyst van alle personen... Door Scherpregeters Handen zyn ter Dood gebragt*... (1774), 9–11; *Aller-Naauwkeurigst Berigt of Verhaal, Aangaande de gruwelyke Moord, geschied door Hidde van Grittinga aan Gerrit Avers En die de Huisvrouw van Avers aan de Housvrouw van Grittinga. Met al het geene wat daar omtrent vorgevallen, van den Jaare 1698. tot 1703. En den volkomenen Inhoud der Sententie, nevens het Verhaal hunner beider Executie, binnen Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: de Wed: Jacobus van Egmont, n.d. [1703]).

The term "smous" begins to appear in popular literature about 1720, clearly in connection with the issues of "Windhandel." "The 'smous' is a crooked dealer and a specialist in bad practices." Bovenkerk, "Nederlandse schrijvers," 737, on representation of Jews in pasquinades, 737–56.

⁵⁹ One alias of Jan Baptist Benes, a thief seized in Antwerp in 1743, was "The Changer" (*wisselaer*) in part, but only in part, because he dealt in false bills. FA, V 162, fols. 207, 214.

⁶⁰ SA, inv. 5061, 640i–l. ⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Van Perre was certainly a crook, but the conclusion drawn in the case quickly situated his individual crimes in the broader framework of civic and mercantile security and propriety, noting the “dangerous and pernicious consequences” because these actions “subverted both public and particular trust and security.” Such could not therefore be tolerated in a polity where commerce dominated and must therefore be “rigorously punished to serve as an example and warning to others.” Van Perre ended up on the scaffold.⁶²

Thus, while merchants did business in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in some inventive ways, perhaps the most telling differences in these decades was the pervasive expansion of such tools and practices in economic life.⁶³ Not only were mercantile Gargantuas seduced, middling and even small businessmen also got involved. Speculation in stocks was novel, while speculation in goods was considerably older. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries speculators generally thought in terms of “difference . . . between what one agreed to pay, to sell at, to deliver stock at, or receive it at, and what one found at the stipulated time to have become the prevailing value.”⁶⁴ Not everyone speculated in money and funds; many businesses continued to run on an older model that, even in the mid eighteenth century, mostly rejected the use of written contracts and double-entry, “Italian” bookkeeping methods. If they did use them they did so crudely. Even a major firm, like that of the Della Failles in Antwerp, or the East India Company, which both employed those more modern methods, still had balance sheets that were “very confused and [that] do not provide information about their situation in any detail because there are no profit and loss accounts.”⁶⁵

Moreover, it is easy to overstate the extent of change and to be startled by the loud shrieks of horror that greeted practices dubbed newfangled and thus branded unwholesome. A detailed study of the Della Faille firm in Antwerp, a trading company with vast resources and reach, observed that the entry of middling and small traders into international trade, using the putatively more recently developed methods of, for example, the commission trade, actually dated from the sixteenth century. The mixed companies of the sixteenth century were the obvious forerunners of the joint stock companies that dominated

⁶² *Ibid.*, dated 16 January 1670.

⁶³ Kessler, *Revolution*, 294, observes that “the eighteenth century witnessed the rise of a new kind of credit economy” (294) in which new instruments of credit, such as stocks and bills of exchange, played a major role and which also raised new concerns about the greater impact of those very practices, provoking what she terms “a crisis in virtue” (188–237).

⁶⁴ Originally published in Spanish, Joseph de la Vega, *Confusion de confusiones . . . 1688: Portions Descriptive of the Amsterdam Stock Exchange*, has been skillfully and knowledgeably selected and translated by Hermann Kellenbenz (Boston, MA: Baker Library, 1957). Kellenbenz’s introduction is especially valuable. Here, xvii. All further references to Vega’s work are taken from this edition.

⁶⁵ Houtte, *Economic History*, 207.



FIGURE 6 Title page to *Schatz Kammer Italiänischen Buchhaltens* [Treasury of Italian Bookkeeping] (Hamburg: n.p., n.d.)

economic life after 1600. The Della Faille records also demonstrated that, although the firm's principals "involved themselves in an ever larger bill-changing [business], nonetheless a speculative money business was never important to them." This investigation centered on the sixteenth century, and a single company, and so these findings cannot be simply applied to later periods or used to generalize. They usefully remind us, however, that despite the expanding significance of the money trade and the accelerated employment of bills of exchange in speculative ventures, not all firms slighted more traditional operations. The Della Failles' main interests in the sixteenth century remained in commodities and not in money. Other sixteenth-century merchants followed much the same path and primarily (approximately 80 percent of the time) used bills in their classic form, that is, "whereby money was transferred in [only] one direction whether for purchasing goods or payment on *asientos*." Only a small percentage of bills went into what may be called a speculative market, that is, "bills-for-bills" (*wissel-om-wissel*). The idea that "speculation on exchange surpassed active trade or played an independent role" for merchants, seems an outright myth. "For the seventeenth-century merchant, the useful character of bills of exchange lay practically exclusively . . . in transferring funds for

investments or as payments in an international commodity trade”; their greatest engagement with bills of exchange was not speculative.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, the money trade became more visible and central in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in mercantile and financial centers. Of course, what many contemporaries regarded as universal practices, and usually reviled as behaviors that undermined true prosperity and insidiously destroyed the common good were probably by no means as widespread as they thought, or as historians have accepted as true. Anne Goldgar, for example, has convincingly argued that the “tulipmania” which generations of historians believed had willy-nilly ruined large, middling, and small investors, really exerted a much more limited impact and affected mostly connoisseurs, admittedly hitting them hard. The scare actually produced questions about trust, honor, and the estimation of the value inherent in an ephemeral good.⁶⁷ Her analysis stands as a cautionary tale; it warns us to be extremely wary about accepting received wisdom about the dimensions and meanings of financial speculations, “bubbles,” “wind-trading,” and bankruptcies and to examine closely the myths historians make.

Still, the nervousness about business and business practices over the course of the long eighteenth century did not have the consistency of a soap-bubble. We cannot ignore it, although we must weigh and judge the rhetoric it produced with considerable circumspection. If the dramatic and catastrophic disasters generally connected to the floral manias of the 1630s turned out to be so much wind, other financial disasters were not. A careful interrogation of the historical record reveals their significance even if rhetoric has obfuscated and exaggerated their dimensions. Several events in these years occasioned intense debate and action along several political and economic axes even when the actual damage done never equaled the rhetoric expended in either volume or tone: the *Windhandel* (the “bubble trade,” or speculative “frenzy” of the early 1720s) and the far more traumatizing global financial crises of 1763, 1772/3, and 1783.⁶⁸ These clashes between morality and business advantage can also be traced in the uproars that attended cases of fraud, “deceitful” stockjobbing, and malicious bankruptcy.

⁶⁶ Peter W. Klein, “Kapitaal en stagnatie tijdens het Hollandse vroegkapitalisme,” in Carolus A. Davids, W. Fritschy, and L. A. van der Valk (eds.), *Kapitaal, ondernemerschap en beleid: Studies over economie en politiek in Nederland, Europa en Azië van 1500 tot heden* (Amsterdam: NEHA, 1996), 38–9.

⁶⁷ Anne Goldgar, *Tulipmania: Money, Honor, and Knowledge in the Dutch Golden Age* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁶⁸ Oscar Gelderblom and Joost Jonker offer a good corrective to older, more alarmist literature. They stress the disjuncture between overheated rhetoric about “bubbles” and the actual impact of the crisis which they regard as not “deep.” “Mirroring Different Follies: The Character of the 1720 Bubble in the Dutch Republic,” in William N. Goetzmann, Catharine Labio, Geert Rouwenhorst, and Timothy G. Young (eds.), *The Great Mirror of Folly: Finance, Culture, and the Crash of 1720* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 121–39.

That “pernicious commerce of stockjobbing”⁶⁹

Without doubt new in the seventeenth century was the trade in stocks and the rise of a group of men who dealt in them; the Dutch referred to the latter as *actionisten* after *actie* or stock. The most valued stocks were those of the various overseas privileged companies and indeed represented the first stocks traded publicly. Amsterdam, as one of the principal chambers (*kamer*) of the Dutch East India Company (and later the West India Company), also formed the epicenter of trade in its stocks, a transaction sometimes conducted with dubious legality, or quite illegally. Stock-trading drew considerable angry commentary in Amsterdam about its principles and even more about its practices. In Antwerp, larger political circumstances, the city's absorption into two Habsburg empires and the closing of the Scheldt, had curtailed, if never thoroughly strangled, the city's oceanic trade. Nonetheless, here, too, attempts arose to organize similar companies – the Imperial Ostend Company (*Generale Keizerlijke Indische [Oostendse] Compagnie*) established in 1722 and the Imperial Asiatic Company Trieste (*Keizerlijke Aziatische Compagnie*) in 1775. These companies came into being considerably later than the East India Company and had far more limited scope. They thus generated only a very modest trade in stocks. Still the shares offered on the Antwerp Exchange in 1723 sold well. A group of forty-five noble and mercantile movers and shakers quickly snapped up over 3000 shares. Antwerp financiers contributed much capital to all these projects. Nonetheless, political exigencies and economic dislocations truncated the lives of these companies and their existences proved trouble-ridden despite often quite promising beginnings.⁷⁰ Hamburg, despite exploiting a far-flung, even global, trading network, never established a company, although its businessmen and bankers invested heavily in Dutch, Flemish, German, and Scandinavian trading ventures such as the Ostend Company, the Emden (or Prussian Asiatic) Company, the Brandenburg Africa Company, and the Danish and Swedish East India Companies.⁷¹

Thus, business booms and busts connected to something akin to a stock-market occurred far more commonly in Amsterdam and had greater effects – good and bad – than in Antwerp or Hamburg. Stock-market frauds and disturbances in Antwerp tended to discommode, or sometimes ruin, wealthy bankers

⁶⁹ Stevenson, *Full and Practical Treatise*, 39.

⁷⁰ These important men included the Markies van Prié, the Hertog van Arenberg, and the Graaf de Lalaing. Guillaume Beetemé, *Antwerpen, moederstad van handel en kunst* (new ed.; Antwerp: “bij den schrijver,” 1893), 1: 236–7; Floris Prims, “John Law en Antwerpen, 1720–1731,” *Antwerpiensia* 13 (1939): 232; Prims, “De Asiatische Compagnie,” *Antwerpiensia* 3 (1929): 172–80; “De Oostendsche maatschappij,” *Antwerpsch archievenblad* (1867): 383–459; (1868): 1–150. The Company lost its imperial privilege (*octrooi*) and protection in 1731 but it was not completely liquidated until 1783.

⁷¹ Hamburgers, for instance, invested heavily in the Ostend Company. Ernst Baasch, “Hamburg und die Compagnie von Ostende,” *ZSW* 5 (1897): 309–19.

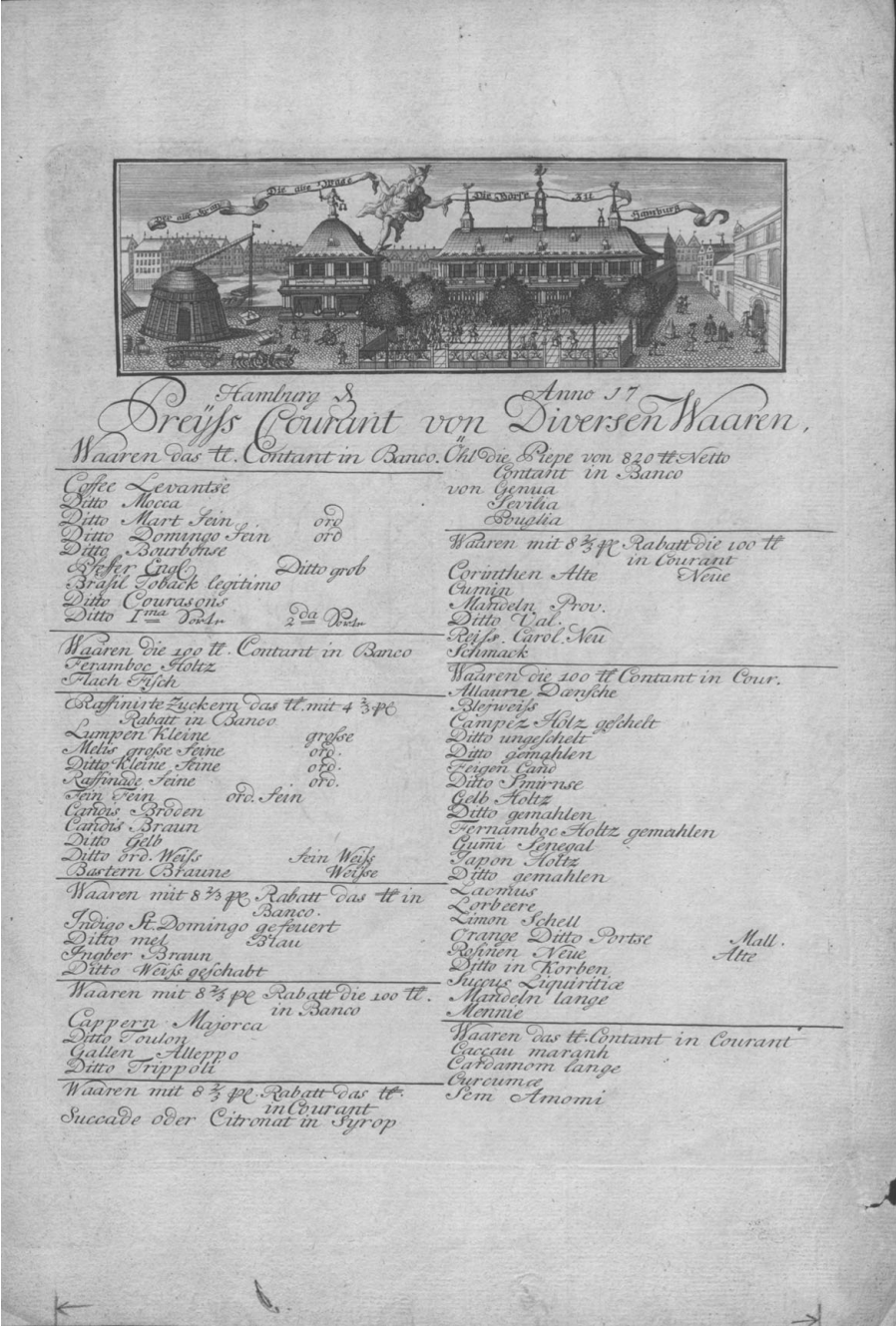


FIGURE 7 “Preÿss Courant von Diversen Waaren,” [“Current Prices of Diverse Goods”] Hamburg, Eighteenth Century

and investors, but were less widely felt. Hamburg, of course, also suffered trade depressions and financial debacles, yet it never experienced the same problems associated with stocks or the failure of companies as did either Antwerp or Amsterdam, although individuals could, of course, gain or lose their investments.

In writing about the South Sea Bubble of 1720, John Carswell noted that “[n]obody had a good word to say for the stock-jobber as he emerged during the 1690s into public notoriety. Yet he was ineradicable.”⁷² Trading in stocks, and jobbing in stocks had become an economic reality long before then. The first stocks that could be traded were those of the Dutch East India Company established in 1602. When the company was set up, theoretically anyone could buy in and rights to payments existed as *partijen* from the term used to indicate sharing in shipping (done to reduce individual risk). By paying a fee, one could transfer *partijen* to another person, either whole or divided. Several types of transactions characterized the trade in Amsterdam: sale of real stocks for immediate cash payments; sales on borrowed money; and, the one that evoked by far the most hostile commentary, future contracts for both speculative and hedging purposes.⁷³

Very early in this history, in 1608, a major stock-market fraud shook the Amsterdam market. Isaac le Maire and several others tried to found a rival French company and substantially depressed prices by selling short (that is, dealing in futures) and spreading rumors detrimental to the Dutch enterprise.⁷⁴ In response, the Dutch government in 1610 forbade selling short and particularly “windy business” defined as dealing in East India shares that the seller did not actually possess. Bona fide owners of shares were, of course, still permitted to sell them. These edicts failed to prevent perceived abuses, however, and had to be repeated later, indeed several times.⁷⁵ The political and military disaster of 1672, for example, evoked a long string of similar responses gauged to steady the market.

Trade in stocks increased again in the 1680s. Between 1650 and 1680, it became common to settle deals in futures. Speculators thus found it simple to conclude even quite large sales or purchases on the basis of small capital. Apparently as early as 1612, some 300 brokers (and twice as many employees of brokers), including many Sephardic Jews, managed the speculative trade in stocks and goods in Amsterdam; it was by then, in every sense, big business.⁷⁶ These circumstances provoked a public discussion that mixed political,

⁷² John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble* (London: Alan Sutton, 1960 [1993 reprint]), 13.

⁷³ Vega, *Confusion*, xvi–xvii; Van Brakel, *Hollandsche handelscompañieën*, 150–61.

⁷⁴ Johannes Gerhard van Dillen, “Isaac le Maire et le commerce des actions de la compagnie des Indes Orientales,” *Revue d’histoire moderne* n.s., 16 (janvier–février 1935): 5–21; Johannes Gerhard van Dillen, “Termijnhandel te Amsterdam in de 16de en 17de eeuw,” *De Economist* 76 (1927): 503–23; Vega, *Confusion*, xiii; Richard Ehrenberg, “Die Amsterdamer Aktienspekulation im 17. Jahrhundert,” *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik* 3rd ser., 3 (1892): 809–26; Van Brakel, *Hollandsche handelscompañieën*, 156–7.

⁷⁵ Vega, *Confusion*, xii, xiii. ⁷⁶ Houtte, *Economic History*, 311.

moral, and economic discourses. That querulous lawyer, Nicolaas Muys van Holy, whom we have met before, spent much of his long litigious life penning bellicose pamphlets exposing those he termed “frauds, cheats, and enemies of the commonweal.” He particularly castigated the jobbing of stocks as politically and morally ruinous. For him, no business was “more pernicious for the Fatherland in general.” “Citizens as well as foreigners” revealed “secrets of the state and the company” for their own selfish gain. They, moreover, “spread false news and rumors expressly designed to inflate and then to depress” stock prices, thus “demeaning the government . . . and the company itself in the eyes of the people.” He placed stockjobbers on the same plane as traitors.⁷⁷ The *belles lettres* of the day similarly pilloried stockjobbers as parasites who dragged honest and respectable men down with them. Whereas the latter appeared on stage as “Vroomaard” (“Pious-Nature”) and “Deugdryk” (“Virtue-Rich”) the stockjobbers kept company with Jews and bore names like Hoopryk” (“Hopeful”) “Snoever” (“Boaster”), “Waaghals” (“Daredevil”), “Schrokhart” (“Glutton”), and “Waanwys” (“Self-Conceit”).⁷⁸

Muys mounted and rode many hobby-horses in his public life and stockjobbing was only one of them; he also inveighed against speculative practices more generally.⁷⁹ Muys buried his contemporaries in torrents of paper that dealt with economic matters and in which he drew explicit connections between the evils of speculative stockjobbing and civic and political morality. Muys crusaded neither quixotically nor alone; many echoed his ideas and many deplored the penalties he suffered (including an imprisonment that lasted until his death in May 1717) for his bravery or audacity, depending on your point of view. His battle against stock speculations signaled his entry on to the stage of public affairs, an activity that would continue, and grow, until the authorities stopped him.

Muys objected to stockjobbing on political and moral as well as economic grounds, although the last was least important to him. He laced his prose with more than a whiff of anti-Semitism because he suspected the heavy involvement of the “Portuguese Nation,” that is, Sephardic Jews, which was indeed

⁷⁷ On Muys, see Meijer M. Roest, “Nicolaas Muys van Holy,” *De Navorscher* 7 (1857): 18–22, 81–5, 150–5, 239–47, and Evenhuis, 4: 245–7. *Middelen en motiven om het kopen en verkopen van Oost- en West-Indische actien, die niet getransporteert werden, mitsgaders ook die de verkoper ten dage van den verkoop niet in eigendom heeft, als mede optie partyen der actien, te beswaren met een Impost ten behoeve van het gemeene Land en de stad Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1687), Knuttel 12622; Vega, *Confusion*, xii–xiii.

⁷⁸ See the section on “Text, Image, Culture,” in Goertsmann *et al.* (eds.), *Great Mirror*, 141–261.

⁷⁹ For Muys’s attack on stocks, *Middelen en motiven*; C. van de Haar, “Romeyn de Hooghe en de pamflettenstrijd van de jaren 1689–1690,” *TVG* 69 (1956): 155–71. Israel (856) refers to De Hooghe as “the foremost engraver of the later Golden Age, [and he] was also a leading Orangist propagandist who published numerous engravings exalting the exploits of the Stadholder in the field.” In another place, Israel refers to the stream of anti-Orangist writings by Muys and others as “somewhat weak.” “The Dutch Role in the Glorious Revolution,” 153.

true.⁸⁰ His writings flowed into the polemical stream attacking “previously unheard of” economic habits that, born in the seventeenth century, grew stronger in the eighteenth, and especially in the writings of generations of scholars since then. A counter-discourse ran here as well; one that regarded commerce and speculation as beneficial. Underlying both, however, lay a mentality that associated economics and commerce indissolubly with civic and political life.⁸¹

Muys’s antipathy to stockjobbing was clear, even rabid, but his opponents deployed a similar rhetoric to the opposite purpose. They fretted that Muys’s solution – he proposed taxing each exchange of stocks – would be “damaging and entirely devastating to commerce, for it would place a heavy burden and impose on all the goods and mercantile striving in this land.” Muys’s adversaries also drew more comprehensive conclusions: not only would such rash proposals harm commerce and merchants, but any attempt to impede the free flow of stocks would also prove disastrous for the commonwealth, harming “the true welfare of trade and [undermining] the conservation of the polity.” This author, too, emphasized the value of merchants for the prosperity and well-being of the state and laid upon every right-thinking citizen, like himself, the sacred duty to promote those goods. “I consider,” he proclaimed proudly, that the “duty of a good citizen” was to further “the commonweal and well-being of his fatherland . . . [and] according to his own abilities to help preserve and protect it.”⁸² Here, too, early in Muys’s career, the issue of freedom arose; it was an issue that Muys would return to later and in an overtly political way in his more general attacks on civic corruption.⁸³

Others echoed Muys’s disapproval of stockjobbing and also distinguished, sometimes tortuously, between proper business methods and proper dealings in shares and a duplicitous, grasping, treacherous, and “Jewish” manipulation of markets and stocks. Joseph de la Vega penned his famous *Confusion de confusiones* (1688) in part “to warn people against entering into speculation by acquainting them with the deceitful measures, but especially to unmask the evildoers.” The title reflected de la Vega’s belief that the business remained

⁸⁰ Vega, *Confusion*, xiii.

⁸¹ It should be noted that the actual deleterious economic effects of stockjobbing and especially the “bubble-trade” in Holland were probably not as severe as in England. Gelderblom and Jonker, “Mirroring.”

⁸² *Relaes en Contradicte op de motieven, om het koopen en verkoopen van Oost- en West-Indische actien, die niet getransporteert werden, ende optie partyen te bewaeren met een Impost by de Heer Nicolaes Muys van Holy, Advocaet tot Amsterdam, onwetende voorgesteld, en daer en boven getoont waer in waerlyk Hollants intrest en welvaeren bestaende is*, (1687), Knuttel 12622a; *Middelen en motiven*.

⁸³ *Vindiciae Amstelodamenses, of Contra-Spiegel der Waarheid. Vertoonende door een zeer fijn Kristalijne glas eenige vlekken en gebreken van sommige Hollandsche en andere Provinciaale Bullebakker, welke gewoon zyn de Heeren Regenten van de Stad Amsterdam met leugen en lasteringen te bekladden* (Molqueren: Tiebbe Tabes, 1690), Knuttel 13484. Muys is generally considered the author of this pamphlet or at least a collaborator.

inherently irrational and uncontrollable: “one moved in a world of darkness which nobody wholly understood.” A staged conversation involving a philosopher, a merchant, and a shareholder illustrates these differences while privileging the knowledge of the merchant. “Mr. Merchant” by no means opposed stocks or even stockjobbing but carefully held himself aloof from any sort of “windy business.” The philosopher is the foil; not the model. Baffled by the movements of the economic world, he queries “Shareholder” about how the trade in stocks works:

I really must say that you are an ignorant person, friend Greybeard, if you know nothing of this enigmatic business which is at once the fairest and most deceitful in Europe, the noblest and the most infamous in the world, the finest and the most vulgar on earth. It is a quintessence of academic learning and a paragon of fraudulence; it is a touchstone for the intelligent and a tombstone for the audacious; a treasury of usefulness and a source of disaster, and finally a counterpart of Sisypheus who never rests as also of Ixion who is chained to a wheel that turns perpetually.

The best part of this “new business” is that “one can become rich without risk.” Shareholder’s discourse represents as normal a false-principled practice and one that imposture facilitated. For instance, if you have “bad luck in your transactions,” that is, lose your shirt, “you will only change your name.”

Just as the Hebrews, when they are seriously ill, change their names in order to obtain relief, so a changing of his name is sufficient for the speculator who finds himself in difficulties, to free himself from all impending dangers and tormenting disquietude.⁸⁴

It was not only gamblers and speculators who engaged in this business, although they posed the greatest dangers for the economy and the polity alike. “Princes of business” traded in shares as well but the movement of stocks remained basically irrelevant to them. Ordinary merchants, however, “consider their risk as much as their profit.” They prefer small gains and security and “to have no worries other than those bound up with unforeseen events.” The labyrinth of shady deals the speculators created, their ability to draw in people from every social group, the excuses they dreamed up to avoid their creditors when they could not cover their obligations, insisting that if “I lose in the purchase . . . I am not obliged to pay,” conjured into being air-castles of wealth and profit. Even when substantial, if temporary, wealth results the shareholders/speculators spend “the greater part of the profits from this gambling . . . on cards, dice, wine, banquets, gifts, ladies, carriages, splendid clothing, and other luxuries.” The Merchant concludes that:

I on my part thank you for the instruction. I esteem business but hate gambling. I have a notion that my faculties do not suffice for such complicated transactions. If I nearly lost my sense when I wanted to learn about the speculations, you may conclude of what importance to me is the conduct of Exchange transactions. It is possible that I shall

⁸⁴ English translations from Kellenbenz’s edition of Vega, *Confusion*, 3.

become a holder of shares and shall deal [in shares] in an honest way, but I am very sure that I shall never become a speculator.⁸⁵

Such pamphlets moralistically condemned new ways of doing business in the seventeenth century and purportedly exposed their wide-ranging deleterious effects. The first market bubble and market crash of 1607 and 1608, when East India Company shares first doubled in value and then plummeted to 130 percent because of the speculations of Isaac le Maire and his associates, were not imaginary; they definitely unsettled business in Amsterdam. Similar events followed hard on the heels of this initial experience with market booms and busts and they occurred with increasing frequency. The founding of the West Indies Company in 1621 generated another flurry of speculative enterprises that thereafter waxed and waned. The Dutch government reacted to each subsequent speculative spike by passing laws that quite successfully averted “windy trading.”⁸⁶

Rhetorically, two worlds of business practice stood opposed to each other and that division bore deep implications for civic and political life. Ideal types personified the two positions: there was, on the one hand, the upright, honest, fair-trading merchant whose business won him respect and made him prosperous but who also served as the model of a good citizen in political and civic terms. His actions preserved and promoted trade and freedom. On the other side stood, or rather skulked, his dark twin: the speculator, whose deals generated only ephemeral paper wealth, whose tricks and contrivances corrupted civic virtue, whose frequent bankruptcies undermined political stability as much as they eroded the solid bases of the urban economy. How real *were* the differences? That judgment must rest on a detailed consideration of specific cases of speculation and bankruptcy as actual circumstances. First, however, we need to examine how people conceived of honesty and right dealings in business more generally.

Honesty and trust

Honesty frustrates simple definitions in all aspects of life and nowhere is that problem more evident than in the world of business. Businessmen are not, of course, constitutionally less honest, or more dishonest, than others, but the exchange of money, the expectations of value for it, and the human tendency to want a good deal complicate views on perceptions of probity. At first it seems all very simple. The ideal merchant and *gens d'affaires* seek profit and prosperity through trade. He or she (for women headed many firms in all three cities) deployed intelligence and business acumen to strike “sound business deals, offered goods and wares of attested quality, and stood behind her or his word

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, xi–xii, 3, 5, 29, 42.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, xiii; Van Brakel, *Hollandsche handelscompagnieën*, 154–8.

even when deals soured.” As Anne Goldgar cogently remarks: “trade involves not only trust in one’s own capacities, but also in the word of others.”⁸⁷ The credit of others was, however, difficult to gauge on a day-by-day basis and one was well advised: “If you wish to extend credit to someone, do not be blinded by external appearances but rather let the nature . . . of the person guide you; proof the gold of trust according to internal worth.” This interlocutor did not spell out how exactly how one was to penetrate to the “inner worth,” but the warning not to be misled by externals reflected concerns about imposters and about the damage they did to the common good as well as the business deal.⁸⁸

But was absolute honesty required? Was it possible even in the putatively less complex world of face-to-face retail and domestic exchanges, let alone in the rough-and-tumble world of long-distance trade, greater commodification, and novel business techniques? Even those who created the most ideal of ideal types recognized the existence, indeed the utter essentiality, of a dash of cunning in persons whose affairs flourished. Certainly, “deception and opportunism . . . belong to the repertory of an enterpriser.” Just as clearly, there were times when self-interest became outright theft or sales patter an outright lie.⁸⁹ All spectators projected much the same image of probity. For Van Effen, a good merchant was knowledgeable, generous, and charitable and “so honest in his dealings that one can put more trust in his word in business than in the handclasp or oath of another.”⁹⁰ The portrait of *The Patriot*’s perfect merchant, Pasiteles, stressed the value of the merchant and merchant virtues to the polity and society more generally, but Pasiteles also personified the honest and upright merchant, who, despite his wealth, *amour propre*, and business sense, never cheated the city out of a single *pfennig*; “No integrity is more complete than that of a man of conscience who carries out his [civic] duties to promote the Common Good.” Nor did he put his own search for profit above the good of his city. He would, for instance, “never allow his business to benefit outsiders rather than his fellow-burgers [merely] for the sake of some small advantage.” Furthermore, he regarded with contempt those who did so “as [projecting] the clear sign of a person in whom no patriotic heart beats and for whom the prosperity or distress of his father-city [*Vater-Stadt*] is unimportant as long as he and his own benefit.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Goldgar, *Tulipmania*, 281–2. ⁸⁸ *Der Patriot*, no. 31 (3 August 1724).

⁸⁹ Clé Lesger, “Over het nut van huwelijk, opportunisme en bedroeg, ondernemers en ondernemerschap tijdens de vroegmoderne tijd in theoretisch perspectief,” in Davids *et al.* *Kapitaal*, 74.

⁹⁰ *Hollandsche Spectator*, no. 154 (17 April 1733). Wijnand Mijnhardt notes that “the message of the *Hollandsche Spectator* was hardly original. It reveals striking resemblances to similar enlightened periodicals in England and Protestant Germany. Van Effen, however, introduced a new and characteristically Dutch element which, typically enough, had been lacking in Rabus’s *Boekzaal*: concern about the loss of Dutch prestige in international affairs.” “The Dutch Enlightenment,” 206.

⁹¹ *Der Patriot*, no. 155 (20 December 1726).

The preservation of one's credit, both real and metaphorical (a clear distinction between the two is a modern idea alien to early modern people) formed here a *sine qua non*. It was as valuable and sensitive as one's "eye-ball . . . [and] as the smallest speck of dirt clouds [vision], so, too, does the smallest impropriety blacken [one's reputation]." A mid century observer situated the Hamburg merchant between the Dutch and the English versions: "He is born and educated in trade . . . even the sons of intellectuals hear and see from infancy onwards nothing except [the motto]: 'earn [your bread] honestly'."⁹²

Nonetheless, neither Van Effen nor *The Patriot* ignored the realities of life. A careful reading of their works, as of many others, reveals how they nuanced the issue of honesty and parsed fairness. They realized that good business required an element of dissemblance or even guile. A successful businessman was neither a naïf nor a patsy. *The Patriot*, for example, understood the value of mixing virtue with a sensibly tempered drive for worldly success. He offered the following advice to an aspiring merchant in making deals: "you may, of course, demand a higher price for your wares [than they warrant]. But do not be motivated by greed . . . [yet avoid], as the maxim teaches, 'going to get wool and being shorn'." The Dutch *Merchant* was also a spectator but an eminently practical one; he, too, trod the line between idealism and realism, for example, warning against "recklessness" and "deceit," but also "disproportional frankness."⁹³

Despite the tired phrases the spectatorial press often marshaled, it also disseminated hard-headed advice about making one's way in the business world and allowed for some truth-twisting in the conscionable and laudable pursuit of wealth. Van Effen, for example, did not see "how it injures a [merchant's] good name if he speaks but part of the truth and remains silent about the rest." He grasped the nettle of differentiating between acceptable misdirecting (*mis-leiding*) and unacceptable deceit (*bedroeg*). Surely that was a hard distinction to maintain in real life. In response to those who felt that both had the same purpose "to convince someone that something was true when it was not," he postulated a very pronounced difference. He compared business tactics to a card game, where bluffing and dead-panning formed perfectly fair stratagems. Drawing bottoms, palming, and the like were, however, dishonest. As in cards, so in business. One had to mind the rules of the game, but those rules permitted a degree of subterfuge. He explained in greater detail where the boundaries lay. "Any merchant," he insisted, "may employ speedy methods and secret correspondence to conceal what he knows and [thus] turn events to his own

⁹² *Ibid.*, no. 31 (3 August 1724); Christian Ludwig von Griesheim, *Verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage des Tractats: Die Stadt Hamburg in ihrem politischen, öconomischen und sittlichen Zustande; nebst Nachträgen zu diesem Tractate; und Beyträgen zu der Abhandlung: Anmerk. u. Zugaben über den Tractat die Stadt Hamburg, welche selbigen ebenfalls verbessern und gewisser machen* (Hamburg: Wilhelm Drese, 1760), 99.

⁹³ *Der Patriot*, no. 31 (3 August 1724); *De Koopman*, part 4, no. 9; Brugmans, "De Koopman," 91, 102.

avail." He possessed "the freedom to misguide others without [actually] duping or cheating them." Not all was tolerable: if he, for instance, "spread false rumors" in order to obtain "an unfair advantage or an unlawful profit," then he fully deserved to forfeit all credit in the eyes of his fellows.⁹⁴

Another spectatorial publication that appeared in Amsterdam in the 1760s specifically addressed merchants. Gerrit Bom's *The Merchant* likewise presented a differentiated picture of what mercantile morality and good practice might be. He, too, much like Van Effen, allowed "certain tricks and sleights of hand" in normal business dealings. Yet, in general, he stressed the morality of commerce, viewed the money trade as a fully legitimate part of business, and accepted stock-trading (*actiehandel*) while decrying stock-speculating (*actiespel*).⁹⁵

If one investigates what specific individuals, firms, and families did, the problems of trust and deceit become yet more intriguingly imbricated. Obviously, no society can be built on calculated deceptions, but daring opportunism and slightly shady ploys existed in the repertoire of every merchant and every official. The political and economic worlds valued and rewarded cleverness, or even cunning and artifice, as much as they condemned hypocrisy and treachery. By no means did all crimes demand outright social death as recompense, neither on the exchange, nor in the city hall, nor in the public's eye. Later successes could, for instance, obliterate the memory of previous faults. Earlier dubious practices often paved the road that a merchant followed to get a start or acquire necessary capital. That is, for instance, what happened with the progenitor, Jan, of the well-known Antwerp mercantile and political family, the Della Failles. In the 1530s, he apparently abused the trust of his first patron to acquire his start-up capital. The dirt did not stick, or did not stick long, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries his descendants counted among the most powerful families in Antwerp.⁹⁶

Of course, the spectatorial and moral weekly press was prescriptive, not descriptive. It was also not philosophical in any deep or sophisticated way. What the various "patriots," "spectators," "observers," and "reasoners" all wanted was to improve manners and morals; they all sought practical improvements and their programs found a home in the utilitarian or economic associations of the later eighteenth century, such as the Dutch *Society for the Advancement of the Public Good* (established in 1784) or the *Hamburg Society for the Promotion of the Arts and Useful Crafts* (Patriotic Society).⁹⁷ Their rhetoric, however, and the images they projected arose from real economic,

⁹⁴ *Hollandsche Spectator*, no. 36 (29 February 1732).

⁹⁵ Brugmans, "De Koopman," 111–12.

⁹⁶ For interesting theoretical perspectives on trust and opportunism among merchants, see Lesger, "Over het nut." He takes the Della Faille story (73–4) from the larger work of Brulez, *Firma*, 17–21.

⁹⁷ Antwerp did not have anything like a similar society until the end of the century and then it was more devoted to the promotion of high culture than general public benefit. This was

legal, and political situations. All were close observers, literally, of contemporary events and all drew examples and issues from what they experienced in their own localities. The Hamburg Patriotic Society was founded in the wake of the 1763 economic crisis and the Amsterdam branch of the Dutch Society to help revive the city's lagging economic fortunes. Many published spectators came from, or were allied with, mercantile families. Moreover, the same words, the same ideas, and the same rhetoric lay embedded in polemics, legal briefs, petitions, and personal statements (including testimony) as could be found in the spectators' and patriots' mouths.

Even portrayals of ideal types expressed a certain understanding for business cunning that sailed dangerously close to deceitful practices by allowing merchants to mislead but not cheat. Staying on the right side of that line was, however, often difficult and sometimes impossible. Where contemporaries drew the boundaries and where acceptably crafty or even sharp practices crossed over into the forbidden terrain of real fraud shifted with time and circumstances. In short, one era's objectionable actions became another's standard. Success, moreover, tended to obliterate the distinctions, or smudge them, while failure cast them into sharper relief. Perhaps nowhere was this equivocality more obvious than in speculation.

Speculation

Speculation was a business reality that became a political bugbear, a matter of civic concern, a popular literary trope, and a persistent moral dilemma. The evils of speculation, or speculation run wild, dominate the very opening scene of *Buddenbrooks*. Musing on the fate of the previous owners of the Buddenbrooks's house in the Mengstraße, the principals of Ratenkamp & Co., the consul Johann Buddenbrooks remarked how tragic was the way the "firm fell off in the last twenty years." His guest, the broker Grätjens, took up the story:

Ah yes, very sad...and when you think what madness led to their ruin – If only Dietrich Ratenkamp hadn't made Geelmaack a partner. God knows, once he started running things, I simply threw up my hands. I knew from very reliable sources...the awful risks he was taking behind Ratenkamp's back, lending money here and taking out credit there, all in the firm's name. Finally, it all came to an end. The banks grew suspicious – nothing left to back him up.⁹⁸

Genootschap ter Aenmoediging der (Schoone) Kunsten established in 1788. Most similar organizations were not founded until after 1800. Hilde Greefs, "Ondernemers en de genootschappen: Een onderzoek naar het gezelschapsleven te Antwerpen tussen 1796–1830," *BTG* 75 (1992): 3–36.

⁹⁸ Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks: The Decline of a Family*, trans. by John E. Woods (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993; Vintage paperback edn., 1994), 18.

Speculation destroyed the once-solid house of Ratenkamp & Co.; behind Ratenkamp's back, his new partner had "speculated . . . in a horrible way." While we generally associate the "Buddenbrooks syndrome" with the almost organically determined decay of great mercantile families, speculation and other fishy business practices that blurred the lines between acceptable and unacceptable, honest and dishonest actions, are as central to the novel's plot as the human foibles and imperfections of its main characters. This view of speculation, as a quasi-moral flaw, has often been associated with other moralistic judgments on, for example, mercantile lassitude generated by the lure of a luxurious and indolent lifestyle. Speculation played a major role, therefore, in how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century observers, as well as nineteenth-century commentators and historians since then, have crafted the story of business failures.⁹⁹

Speculation was, in every sense of the word, big business in the long eighteenth century; perhaps even more so, it was big press. Few topics excited more commentary in the growing public sphere and few topics evoked greater horror than the damages speculation putatively wrought on business and morality. Early modernists have been fascinated by the great Tulip Craze of 1636–7, beguiled by the career of John Law, and intrigued by the economic maelstrom from the Mississippi scheme and the South Sea bubble set spinning. Yet how damaging speculative frenzies actually were in real economic terms is open to question.¹⁰⁰ The authors of moral weeklies and commentators on business

⁹⁹ The second number of *Der Patriot* (13 January 1724) discusses a similar decline and fall. Generally, on the history of speculation and crashes, see Charles Poor Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*, 5th edn. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2005 [1978]) and Charles Geisst, *Wheels of Fortune: The History of Speculation from Scandal to Respectability* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2002).

¹⁰⁰ All of these have attracted much interest among historians. Popular and scholarly works abound. On flower speculations, see Ernst H. Krelage, *Bloemenspeculatie in Nederland: De tulpomanie van 1636–37 en de hyacintenhandel 1720–36* (Amsterdam: van Kampen & zoon, 1942); Nicolaas W. Posthumus, "The Tulip Mania in Holland in the Years 1636 and 1637," *Journal of Economic and Business History* 114 (August 1929): 434–66; Mike Dash, *Tulipmania: The Story of the World's Most Coveted Flower & the Extraordinary Passions It Aroused* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001); and, as an important corrective, Goldgar, *Tulipmania*. For perspectives on John Law and his system, see Paul Harsin, "La Banque et le système de Law," in Johannes G. van Dillen (ed.), *History of the Principal Banks Accompanied by Extensive Bibliographies of the History of Banking and Credit in Eleven European Countries* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934): 273–300; Lawrence M. Lande, *The Rise and Fall of John Law, 1716–1720* (Montreal: Lawrence Lande Foundation for Canadian Historical Research, McLennan Library, McGill University, 1982); Robert Minton, *John Law: The Father of Paper Money* (New York: Association Press, 1975); Antoine E. Murphy, *John Law: Economic Theorist and Policy Maker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). On the impact of Law in Holland, see De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 152–8. Popular writers have also devoted books to Law. See, for example, Janet Gleeson, *Millionaire: The Philanderer, Gambler, and Duelist Who Invented Modern Finance* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999). Gelderblom and Jonker argue cogently that there was neither a bubble nor a crash in 1720, for example, and that the overheated rhetoric that accompanied this non-event resulted "because the speculative craze

practices warmed to the topic and produced a rhetoric that virtually equated speculation with bankruptcy, fraud, and, reaching even further, with undermining republicanism.

Much has been made of such jeremiads, perhaps because they are so easily available, so quotably pungent in language, and seemingly so useful in allowing scholars to perceive and portray the mindset of early modern capitalists, stalwart citizens, and urban governors. Before becoming convinced by these attacks on speculators, frauds, and bankrupts – who were, as we shall see, rolled together in virtually the same package of undesirables – we should heed Simon Schama's advice on just this topic: "moralizing aside . . . [speculation] was in fact only a more extreme form of the practices which arose naturally in an economy where delivery times were bound to be uncertain and prolonged."¹⁰¹ Commission trade dominated business in goods everywhere. Schama's observation should prompt us to think again about how rhetoric and practice entwined and to what extent Thomas Gray's "words that burn" masked an absolutely ordinary practice that was not even universally condemned. One can accept too easily that everyone viewed speculation and speculators as insidious dangers to business or civic life. Likewise, one must avoid swallowing whole the idea that speculators were inevitably fly-by-night businessmen or investors. It was not only the man with a get-rich-quick mentality, the evil intentioned, or the investor of shallow bottom who speculated: the rich and the well-established just as readily involved themselves although their deeper pockets often cushioned them when disaster struck.

First, the rhetoric: Choice rhetorical tidbits condemning speculation are abundant and it is simple to extract particularly apposite illustrations. In defining the "frivolous" (*leichtsinnige*) bankrupt, a category that shaded over (as we see in [Chapter 6](#)) into that of the "malicious" (*bösartige*) bankrupt, speculation often took the blame. Speculators engaged in "the dangerous enterprise of taking on more than they are able to handle and [are those] who concern themselves with forbidden dealings in stocks, premiums, and other 'windy business'; and all those who make noxious bill-jobbing their main occupation."¹⁰² These speculative business practices had reputedly plunged many merchants into bankruptcy, ruined others in their fall, undercut the business life of the city, and, last but hardly least, threatened to destroy civic morality and urban republicanism. Speculators were cast as multi-dimensional

did not have a deep impact" and thus it could remain "a source of wonderment and fun." "Mirroring," 133.

¹⁰¹ Schama, *Embarrassment*, 350; De Vries and Van der Woude, *First*, 150–1.

¹⁰² Article 104 of *Der Stadt Hamburg Neue Falliten-Ordnung. Auf Befehl E. Hochedlen Rathes publicirt d. 31. Aug. 1753* (Hamburg: Conrad König, 1753), 77. Attempts to distinguish between types or degrees of bankruptcy and the relative guilt attached to them was common. See, for example, Johann Georg Krünitz, *Oekonomische Encyklopädie oder allgemeines System der Staats-, Stadt-, Haus- und Landwirtschaft in alphabetischer Ordnung* (242 vols.; Berlin: Pauli, 1773–1852), 3: 515–19.

miscreants. While condemnation of them would wane by mid century, it never died out entirely.

Contemporaries almost reflexively coupled their angst about speculative practices, the misuse of bills of exchange, and fiscal frauds to a related lack of political scruples. Speculators, like usurers, pederasts, and seducers all shared the same “qualities” and one commentator facetiously advised them how to succeed in this dastardly business:

Abuse trust, abuse the feelings that bind one [person] to another, be sly and conniving; cultivate a public opinion of yourself as an honest and upright man and [give out the impression] that you command wealth and inexhaustible resources so that people hurry to you, [desire to profit from] your deceptive generosity, and thrust their goods into your hands, [ones] that apparently labor only for the benefit of all.¹⁰³

Speculation, especially when coupled with the fraudulent or reckless use of bills of exchange, formed a frequent theme in literature where it received no less hostile treatment. Several Dutch and German playwrights quickly reworked Moliere’s *Tartuffe* to this purpose; hypocrisy in religious values turning into hypocrisy in business dealings in plays such as “The Sanctimonious Deceiver/ Or Tartuffe” and “The Mucker-Out or the Canting Con-Man.” Pieter Langendijk’s comedy about the Law system, “Quincampoix, or the Sellers of Wind,” appeared in several German versions and was quickly printed in Hamburg as “Quincampoix, or the Windy-Business.”¹⁰⁴ Johann Jakob Dusch authored a melodrama about bankruptcy with the subtitle, “A Civic Tragedy.” The hero of the play, the honest, old-fashioned merchant, Erast, is gulled into accepting a false bill of exchange by a conniving Jew and then advised by a ruthless broker to recoup his losses by speculating with other peoples’ money, which he indignantly refuses to do.¹⁰⁵ As these examples amply demonstrate,

¹⁰³ *Geheime Nachrichten aus dem Leben einiger der berühmtesten Wucherer, Unterhändler, Rabulisten, Bankerottiers, Geldschneiders, und Jugendverführer unserer Zeiten* (Vienna: n.p., 1798), 17–18.

¹⁰⁴ Reinhart Meyer (ed.), *Bibliographie dramatica et dramaticorum: Kommentierte Bibliographie der in ehemaligen Reichsgebiet gedruckten und gespielten Dramen des 18. Jahrhunderts* (6 vols.; Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1986), 3: 15; 4: 334–5. Pieter Langendijk’s *Quincampoix of de windhandelaars* (Amsterdam: Lescaillie en Rank, 1720) played fifteen times in Amsterdam between 28 September and 23 November 1720 and Langendijk’s other play on the *windhandel*, *Arleyn actionist*, ten times in the same period. Both were commercial successes for the theater if not for the playwright. Kees Smit, *Pieter Langendijk* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000), 153. See also Catherine Labio, “Staging Folly in the Dutch Republic, England, and France,” in Goertzmann et al. (eds.), *Great Mirror*, 143–58 and Inger Leemans, “Verse Wavers and Paper Traders: Financial Speculation in Dutch Theater,” in *ibid.*, 175–90.

¹⁰⁵ Johann Jakob Dusch, *Der Bankerot, ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel* (Hamburg: Dietrich Anton Harmsen, 1763). In his preface, Dusch notes that “current events” had occasioned the action of the play; it was, one might say today, “torn from the headlines” (xii). The events he referred to were the bankruptcies that occurred in the wake of the Seven Years War. Speculation and a wild trade in bill-discounting were often blamed for the large dimensions of the financial disaster.

there was no lack of finger-pointing and no hesitation in condemning the evils of speculation throughout the eighteenth century.

Could one speculate honestly? Surely no one wanted to suffer the ignominy and inconvenience of bankruptcy or be tarred with the brush of business immorality. Did speculation fall into the category of the totally unacceptable? Who defined sharp practices anyway? Was speculation inherently wrong or was it just another of those many business techniques that bore some dangers but also great promise?¹⁰⁶ Parallel to the image of speculation as deceitful or, at least, deceptive, ran more positive definitions even in a century culturally scarred by the Law collapse in France and shaken by the bursting of the Mississippi and South Sea bubbles. Speculation could be, and was, also defined as “engagement in any business enterprise or transaction of a venturesome or risky nature, but that offered the chance of great or unusual gain.” Almost all merchants did this at some time in their occupational lives. Speculative skills could be mercantile *virtues*. One late eighteenth-century observer referred approvingly to Hamburg’s merchants as “pregnant with speculations.”¹⁰⁷ The problem was that speculation huddled in the penumbra cast by the juggernaut of economic change.

Likewise, the use of bills of exchange continued to be associated with fraudulent practices, or at least were believed to expedite them, and were often explicitly connected with speculation. A knowledgeable eye-witness to life in Hamburg, one well-connected by marriage and blood to merchant and governing clans, Piter Poel, wrote in the early nineteenth century that success in “old style” business (the kind common in his youth) required nothing more than orderliness and punctuality. Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, he marked a sea-change because “the world [of business] had rearranged itself . . . [and] new combinations facilitated far more extensive business ties, whose unplumbed lucrativeness gave the imagination much room for play.”¹⁰⁸ In that world, speculation had become common among the wealthy and successful as well as among the less fortunate and the outright failures. It could be, as Tom Buddenbrooks found out, a soul-eroding business, filled with anxieties

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Max Safley, in examining bankruptcy in early modern Augsburg, noted that when Ambrosius Höchstetter went bankrupt he was sometimes called a “dangerous and harmful monopolist.” Safley, however, also observes that “[w]hile his reputation clearly suffered among the moralists and commoners of Augsburg, the opinion of his commercial colleagues is less evident. Would such sharp practices have been considered scandalous by other merchants, who might have seen them simply as good business?” “Business Failure,” *BHR* 83 (2009): 47.

¹⁰⁷ The OED dates the definition to 1774, but speculation in this form certainly existed and was acknowledged as such earlier. Quote from Jonas Ludwig von Heß, *Hamburg, topographisch, politisch und historisch beschrieben* (3 vols.; Hamburg: B. G. Hoffmann, 1787–92), 2: 214.

¹⁰⁸ Piter Poel, *Bilder aus vergangener Zeit, nach Mittheilungen aus grossentheils ungedruckten Familienpapieren*, ed. Gustav Poel (2 vols.; Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses, 1884–87), quoted in Heinrich Sieveking, *Georg Heinrich Sieveking: Lebensbild eines Hamburgischen Kaufmanns aus dem Zeitalter der französischen Revolution* (Berlin: Carl Curtius, 1913), 344–5.

and regrets, but hardly a road that anyone with major (or not-so-major) mercantile ambitions could afford not to travel. Virtually every successful Hamburg business house and commercial banking firm engaged in bill discounting and money dealings, and many speculated with *sang-froid* or even breathtaking recklessness. Many were successful, and not only temporarily, but the pace was hot and the moments of sheer terror more frequent than was good for the psyche.

A series of speculative seismic jolts shook the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Speculation, as Muys and others observed, grew symbiotically with stockjobbing, the use of bills of exchange, the greater possibilities opened by accelerated long-distance trading, and, perhaps most important, the seemingly inexorable expansion of the money trade. By the late eighteenth century in Antwerp, families and companies like that of Joseph Jean Le Greele had distanced themselves from “venerable family traditions,” that is, trade in silk, colonial wares, and government bonds, to become major property owners and the possessors of a stock of capital able to be invested: they possessed, in contemporary terms, a solid bank. Their active trade “died a silent death . . . [with] a definitive breakthrough to a specialization in financial operations.”¹⁰⁹ That evolution had taken place much earlier among other firms in Antwerp, but also in Amsterdam and Hamburg.

It was not only these developments that nurtured speculation; they were, however, the most obvious, attracted the most commentary, and seemed most disruptive. They reputedly caused financial failures; they certainly muddled ideas of trust and undid common concepts of credit and credibility. Disapproval of speculation marched together with equally fierce criticisms of a broader tendency for merchants to disengage from trade and let their money make money. One analyst, for instance, felt that many mid eighteenth-century Hamburg merchants shied away from active trade as too risky. “Sitting on filled coffers, they want to have their cake and eat it too and desire a security that life cannot offer; thus their wealth does not grow.” On the other side of caution lay audacity: “Many dare too much in speculation and insurance schemes . . . the speculative expectations do not always fulfill their plans and hopes.”¹¹⁰ Unwillingness to remain active in trade, willingness to speculate, especially in financial matters, formed different sides of the same coin: a debasement of mercantile energy, a loss for the economy, and a disaster for the polity.

Speculation, of course, does not necessarily involve trade in money – the buying of futures in grain, for example, is also a speculation (and the one that so disturbed Tom Buddenbrooks). As the common dictionary definition suggests almost any risky trade can be speculative. The word speculation as a term of

¹⁰⁹ Anne Fremault, “Bankier tussen oud en nieuw, Joseph J. Le Greele: Bedrijfshistorische analyse van een Antwerpse privé-bank (1792–1830),” (Licentiaat, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1985), 5, 57.

¹¹⁰ Griesheim, *Verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage*, 105.

abuse in the early modern world applied to a range of instances, not all of which were perceived as either gambling, quasi-legal, or simply crooked. Still, the speculation that most distressed contemporaries and that had a major impact (not necessarily, one hastens to add, a negative one) on each urban economy was connected to two things: the establishment of the various trading companies, of which the Dutch East India Company provides the best example, and the kind of speculation in money that bills of exchange and other paper facilitated. Each was often associated with fraud. Contemporaries were very aware that while paper in multiple forms, as stocks, bills of exchange, notarial instruments, and promissory notes, greatly facilitated trade and financial transactions, it also cut.

While perhaps the most obvious and well-known “conspiracies of paper”¹¹¹ were the early eighteenth-century Mississippi and South Sea bubbles, the economic effects had made themselves felt long before then. In each case, specific individuals were associated with the bursting of the bubbles. Most famous was John Law in France who, in the wake of the collapse, had to flee the country. In England, no single person was so obviously linked to the economic disaster. Nonetheless, the pamphlet literature confidently fingered specific men and censured them for the wheeling and dealing that caused the crash. In the case of the South Sea Company established in 1711, the Lord Treasurer Robert Harley fronted the operation. Also deeply involved were the “cunning, plausible” Sir John Blunt, a leading exponent of the Company (whose name became English slang for money: blunt), and Robert Knight, its cashier, whom many viewed as louche characters and who received a thorough drubbing in the press and iconography of the day. In this case, as in so many financial fiddles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, blame adhered to individuals, such as Blunt or Law or thousands of others, both great and small, whom contemporaries endowed with singular power to wreak havoc. That belief facilitated an equally strong one that conflated moral, political, and economic flaws and foibles.¹¹²

The creation of stocks in the East India Company and later the West India Company had stimulated a flurry of activity among stockjobbers; this was

¹¹¹ I have borrowed this phrase from David Liss’s novel, *A Conspiracy of Paper* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).

¹¹² Carswell, *South Sea Bubble*; Helen Julia Paul, *The South Sea Bubble: An Economic History of Its Origins and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2010). Contemporary negative reaction, for instance, attacked Blunt and Knight viciously. For examples, see James Roberts, *A Letter to Sir John Blunt, relating to the third and fourth money-subscriptions* (London: Printed for James Roberts, 1720) and (in verse) Nicholas Amhurst, *An Epistle (with a petition in it) to Sir John Blunt, Bart., one of the directors of the South-Sea Company* (2nd edn.; London: n.p., 1720). See the print depicting “Robert Knight on the Boat to Hell,” reproduced in Carswell, *South Sea Bubble*, Plate VIII. For background to speculative practices before the bubble, see Anne L. Murphy, *The Origins of English Financial Markets: Investments and Speculation before the South Sea Bubble* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Muys's battle. While the speculative ventures of the mid to late seventeenth century apparently affected fewer investors than the 1720 bubbles had done, they nonetheless formed an important period in the history of speculation as contemporaries perceived it. It is often difficult to separate concerns about speculation from concerns about bankruptcies and it was often charged that the first paved the road to the second. We can, however, locate innumerable instances of concern over speculation in the press and legal battles that were not necessarily tied to bankruptcy; ergo, here speculation functioned as an evil in itself and bankruptcy was only one of its multitudinous regrettable results. Thus, as much as bankrupts, speculators were deceitful merchants.

Writing during the second major irruption of stock speculations in the 1680s, Simon de Vries criticized the guileful and, in his eyes, unacceptable business practices of "those scheming double-dealers who happily allow others to starve while they fatten themselves." He set these speculators (and the bankrupts that so many of them became) on the same plane as robbers.

These scummy thieves borrow a hundred thousand guldens of goods . . . on credit. They sell the same straightaway for eighty thousand. They go through that money as fast [as they can] and soon have to enter into negotiations with their creditors who, seeing no other option [of retrieving their losses], agree to getting back fifteen [guldens] on every hundred. These same crooks . . . showing no fear or shame soon appear again in the city, having enriched themselves in one blow to the tune of sixty-five thousand guldens.

Interestingly, De Vries located these "thieves" in a catalog of rarities in the early modern sense, that is, as extraordinary rather than rare. His list included, among other scandals, a double husband murder.¹¹³ Joseph de la Vega, writing about the same time, categorized much speculative trade as, if not outright criminal, at least unscrupulous and patently disreputable.¹¹⁴

The long shadow of John Law

No incident in early modern financial history has been more studied than the affair of John Law that broke in 1720 (although the seventeenth-century "tulip-mania" runs it a close second). Scholarly treatment of speculation has fixed on the early eighteenth-century bubbles and, especially, on the system of John Law, the Mississippi scheme, and the South Sea Bubble, firmly situating speculation and wildcatting – also known as "kite-flying" – in the history of business, state finance, the Atlantic economy, and fiscal innovation. The booms and busts

¹¹³ Simon de Vries, *D'Eedelste Tijd Korting der Weet-gierige Verstanden: Of de Groote Historische Rareit-Kamer Der sonderlinghste Natuerlycke en Boven-natuerlycke Saecken, Geschiedenissen en Voorvallen van allerley slag: Te gelyck voorsien met vrolycke Gemoedsverlustigingen. Voorgesteld by manier van ondersoekende Redenvoeringen tusschen ADEL-AERT, LEES-AERT. VROOM-AERT, VROLYCK-AERT, ROEM-AERT, VREEDEGOND EN ROSE-MOND* (2 vols.; Amsterdam: Jan Bouman, 1682–83), 1: 450–1; 2: 138–41.

¹¹⁴ Vega, *Confusion*.

of these years generated a flood of writings. The pricking of the South Sea and other bubbles and the dissipation of Law's system in France have greatly influenced how contemporaries viewed stockjobbing and paper monetarism and how generations of historians analyzed them. As material from the late seventeenth century illustrates, moralist appraisal of the pernicious effect of speculation on economic behavior and even true prosperity was hardly lacking then. In the wake of the Law scandal, however, virtually *everyone* turned hostile at least rhetorically. How much actual practice changed and how much actual damage resulted are controversial topics and can only be gauged on the basis of archival material and by unraveling the histories of individual businessmen and their firms. One strong thread of scholarly analysis indicates that this financial brouhaha rendered similar endeavors, such as national banks and paper instruments, unpopular and decelerated their development. Throughout the nineteenth century, commentators agreed that the moral effect was considerable and that "solid mercantile practices gave way to . . . a fevered preference for speculating and risk-taking."¹¹⁵

Such was, as we have seen, hardly the case: speculation was not born with Law or the bubbles. By the mid 1720s, one would have been hard pressed to find a defense of Law, speculation, or any sort of economic "game of chance" (*hazardspel*). The terms used to excoriate Law and his system ranged from the indignant to the appalled to the scatological. The outpouring of anti-Law pamphlets and commentary was immense.¹¹⁶ Most critical and renowned was *The Great Mirror of Folly*, a compendium of anti-Law tracts, plays, and satirical plates. While the South Sea Bubble and the Mississippi Company sowed "extensive crops of controversial books and pamphlets" throughout Europe, nowhere "did there appear such a stout and extravagant piece as this Dutch volume."¹¹⁷ When speculation again threatened to be a problem, such as immediately after the Seven Years War, publishers dusted off older prints, poems, and themes, re-linked or edited them and sent them merrily out into the public sphere again.¹¹⁸

The negative picture of Law's schemes that arose in the 1720s has persisted to this day. Charles Mackay's treatment of Law in his *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions*, first printed in 1841 and frequently reissued, even (or perhaps inevitably!) appearing in a twenty-first-century version, presents Law

¹¹⁵ Bilderdyk, 11: 58.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, the pamphlets catalogued by Knuttel as numbers 16481–16518. This list by no means records every pamphlet published.

¹¹⁷ Arthur H. Cole, *The Great Mirror of Folly (Het Groote Tafereel der Dwasheid): An Economic-Bibliographical Study* (Boston: Baker Library, 1949), 3–6. More recent scholarship interprets the Great Mirror as a cultural event requiring an interdisciplinary approach to understand fully. Goertsmann *et al.* (eds.), *The Great Mirror*.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, *Het Wissel en wondertoneel, van den jaare 1763: Of verzameling der geschriften welke over de veelvuldige bankroeten zyn in 't licht gekomen* (n.p., n.d. [1763]), Knuttel 18873; *Ter Nagedagteis van het Wisselvallig wonder Jaar 1763* [1763], Knuttel 18875.

typically as a speculator, gambler, dissembler, and imposter.¹¹⁹ Not until mid-way into the twentieth century did historians and economists come to express greater appreciation for Law as an economic theorist and innovator who developed sophisticated economic concepts such as the real bills doctrine and the scarcity theory of value.¹²⁰

John Law brainchilded the establishment of a national bank to expedite and secure the creation of credit. Credit, and the bank itself, would be backed by real wealth in the form of bullion and land. He also valued trade, seeing it as yet another prime source of national wealth. He originally floated such a plan in 1705 for Scotland as *Money and Trade Considered, with a Proposal for Supplying the Nation with Money*.¹²¹ After fighting a duel in Scotland, he fled to Amsterdam and then bounced back and forth between there and France, engaging in a series of speculative projects all the while. Finally, he submitted a plan for solving France's chronically serious financial difficulties. He proposed eliminating all small trading monopolies and abolishing the private farming of taxes in favor of a national bank and a state company for commerce. His plan found favor with the Regent, Philippe duc d'Orléans, who appointed Law as Controller General of Finances.

In addition, Law sought to foster industry by generating credit, using paper instruments, and reducing the national debt by distributing shares in one great Mississippi Company. The value of shares at first exploded and paper fortunes stacked up, but the whole venture eventually failed disastrously and resulted in the collapse of the general bank and a dizzying downward spiral in the value of its stock; inflated fortunes puffed out of existence and spread financial panic widely. Law's reputation was ruined; he fled the country dressed as a woman and then began a peripatetic existence that saw him making station in Brussels, Rome, Copenhagen, Venice, and, finally, London where he died. The real damage, in London, Paris, and elsewhere seems to have resulted from the intervention of unlicensed, and thus illegal, stockbrokers who sold short for future delivery, or at least that is what contemporaries believed had happened.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Charles Mackay, *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions* (3 vols.; London: R. Bentley, 1841). The most recent edition that I have located is that of 2009 (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2009). Colin McCall's *Crime, Cash, Credit and Chaos* also links Law to a shady underworld again (Matlock, Derbyshire: Solcol, 2007).

¹²⁰ Early favorable accounts include H. Montgomery Hyde, *John Law – The History of An Honest Adventurer* (London: W. H. Allen, 1969) and Robert Minton, *John Law, the Father of Paper Money* (New York: Association Press, 1975). More recent works in this vein are those of Murphy, *John Law* and Aaron Brown, *The Poker Face of Wall Street* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2006). Most recently, Eugene N. White, "The Long Shadow of John Law on French Public Finance: The Mississippi Bubble," in Goertzmman *et al.* (eds.), *Great Mirror*.

¹²¹ (Edinburgh: Andrew Anderson, 1705).

¹²² Cole, *Great Mirror*, 5. Its full title was *Het groote Tafereel der dwaasheid, vertoonende de opkomst, voortgang en ondergang der Actie, Bubbels en Windnegotie, in Vrankrijk, Engeland, en de Nederlanden, gepleegt in den Jare MDCCXX. – Zijnde een Verzameling van alle de Conditien en Projecten van de opgeregte Compagnien van Assurantie, Navigatie, Commerce*

How much real harm was done to how many real people in the these bubbles is not clear. The 1720 incidents caused far-reaching distress, although the damage may have been more psychological than financial; his experiment certainly “produced an indelible impression upon Frenchmen as an enterprise profoundly dangerous for both economic and political reasons.”¹²³ Even where, as in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, the immediate effects of the financial debacle were muted, the animosity toward speculation and speculators waxed exponentially and the rhetoric against them became venomous. Writing in 1939, the Antwerp archivist, Floris Prims, reflected on the mood of the early eighteenth century, a mood that still rang with frightening tremolos in the late 1930s. According to him, public and private finances almost everywhere in western Europe “experienced a mighty cyclone of destruction” during the half decade 1716–20. The “windbag” who had loosed such a violent blow was named Law.¹²⁴

Speculation and the merchant republics

We know the most about how the “windy business” of 1720 was perceived in Holland, although the effects were less pronounced in Amsterdam than elsewhere in the Republic. Because Amsterdam, however, functioned as a major center of news and publishing, as well as finance, a great deal of paper commentary was generated there. The story of the 1720 speculative frenzy in Holland has been written many times, by those who lived with its recent memory, and by later historians and chroniclers who have linked the speculative fever of these years with moral and economic disease.¹²⁵

One contemporary noted how all such attempts to establish similar companies were futile and praised the foresight of a wise government in

etc. in Nederland, zoo wel die in gebruik zijn gebragt, als die door de H. Staten van deze Provintien zijn verworpen: als meede Konstplaatzen, Comedien en Gedigten, door verscheide Liefhebbens uitgegeeven, tot beschimpinge deezer verfoeijelijke en bedrieglijke Handel, waar door in dit Jaar, verscheide Familien en Persoonen van Hooge en Lage Stand zijn reruineerd, en in haar middelen verdorven, en de opregte Negotie gestremd, zoo in Vrankrijk, Engeland als Nederland, – Gedrukt tot waarshouwinge voor de Nakomelingen, in 't noodlotige Jaar, voor veel Zotte en Wijze (1720).

¹²³ This is, for example, the opinion of Cole, *Great Mirror*, 20, who argues that the “halting advance of the joint-stock form of company organization” may be linked to the negative propaganda from the 1720s; quote from Thomas E. Kaiser, “Money, Despotism, and Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France: John Law and the Debate on Royal Credit,” *JMH* 63 (1991): 24; White, “Long Shadow.”

¹²⁴ Prims, “John Law,” 229.

¹²⁵ For an overview, see Cole, *Great Mirror* and Goertzmann *et al.* (eds.), *Great Mirror*. See also Frederik P. Groeneveld, *De economische crisis van het jaar 1720* (Groningen: P. Noordhoff, 1940); André E. Sayous, “Les repercussions de l’affaire de Lae en du South-Sea Bubble dans les Provinces-unies (1720),” *Bijdragen voor vaderlandsche geschiedenis en oudheidkunde* 8, 2 (1941): 57–86.

Amsterdam: “the burgomasters would not accept that such a ruinous idea could have a place in this prosperous merchant city.”¹²⁶ In Amsterdam, and throughout Holland, the real wind-storm blew for no more than half a year and Amsterdam, in particular, “remained conservative and cold, at least from the official viewpoint.” The regents refused to allow the organization of similar Law-like companies, although they could do little to prevent their citizens from investing funds in British or French government debts later assumed by the Mississippi and South Sea Companies. Pamphleteers who raged against the companies harkened back to the “good old values” and praised the advice of “the most knowledgeable and experienced merchants and underwriters” to have “little or nothing [to do] with these new and rash companies of farters [*Windbreakers*].” Another pamphlet, this one stuffed with virulent anti-Semitism, privileged trade in real goods “and the spirit of the slow but steady way to achieve profits and become rich.”¹²⁷ Pamphlets that contemptuously referred to stock-jobbers and “company-men” as “leeches,” and “fools,” and their business as “hocus-pocus” were everywhere *after* the crash and there can be little doubt that the specter of a tumbling house of cards, or rather of negotiable paper, deeply frightened many. Nonetheless, in Amsterdam, and also in Hamburg, the effects were neither catastrophic nor, for that matter, long term, and the depression of 1718–20 was rather quickly surmounted.

Admittedly, hole-in-the-wall traders, who set up shop in coffee-houses on Kalverstraat in Amsterdam contributed much to the inflation of the prices of shares, for instance in the East India Company, that tripled before they collapsed. A diminutive Law, one Gabriel de Souza Brito, proposed outlandish schemes for similar companies. Others, “the so-called Comte de Floor” – probably a noble imposter – conned some in Amsterdam into investing with him by promising fabulous riches from participation in the Mississippi and the South Seas Companies. The rapid failure of both produced a rude awakening. Floor fled Amsterdam without “closing his books,” that is, settling with his creditors and partners, and he did not even satisfy a bet he had made in the enormous

¹²⁶ [Jacques Le Moine de L'Espine], *De Koophandel van Amsterdam, naar alle gewesten des werelds. Bestaande, in Een Verhandeling, van de Waaren en Koopmanschappen, die men daar heenen sendt en wederom ontfangt: Benevens vergelykingen der Munten, Maaten en Gewigten, en op wat wyse menover en weer wisselt* (7th printing/edn.; Rotterdam: Ph. Losel et al., 1753), 814. Le Moine describes how Amsterdam did not have such companies and yet was also caught up to a degree, even a quite substantial degree, in the *windhandel*, *ibid.*, 830–48.

¹²⁷ *De Redenen, Waarom het ongeraden is, zodanige Compagnien Van veele Millioenen guldens binnde deeze Stadt AMSTERDAM Te laten opregten in Materie van ASSURANTIE en NEGOTIE, Als waar toe thans alomme zo groote beweegingen werden gemaakt, zyn zeer veele, en ook gewigtig, en (onder anderen) mede deeze hier na volgende* (Amsterdam: J. Bloom, 1720), Knuttel 16484; *Copie Van een Brief, Geschreven aan de Heer N.N. Waar in word vertoond het Bedrog en schadelykheyt het welk legt in de opregte Compagnien van Negotie, Assurantie &c, in de Noordt-Hollantse Steden, als mede tot Rotterdam, Delft, en Utrecht, &c* (Amsterdam: Isaac Stokmans, 1720), Knuttel 16487.

sum of f100,000.¹²⁸ The rhetoric of the day represented speculators as exactly what good citizens were not: disguised, showy, migratory. They did their business outside normal channels – in Amsterdam, not at the exchange but on Kalverstraat and in the *coffy-huizen* – and at the wrong times, coming in the night like “Jewish usurers.” They even employed women as middle-“men.”¹²⁹

No similar companies existed at the time in Antwerp and thus, no real speculation on stock shares occurred there until the organization of the Ostend Company in 1722. Speculation in goods, especially in pepper, was common and profitable in the sixteenth century and, from about the 1540s, great profits accrued from arbitrage on exchanges; the practice of taking advantage of the price difference between two or more markets). Already in the sixteenth century, one could perceive a shift from dealing in goods to dealing in money, and by the 1560s, speculation in funds was fairly common in Antwerp, although its dimensions never outpaced old-fashioned commodity trading.¹³⁰ Despite the geo-political situation pertaining between the Dutch Republic and the Spanish Netherlands, more than 57 percent of the capital originally invested in the Dutch East India Company was Flemish, much of it from Antwerp. Throughout the early and mid seventeenth century, Antwerpeners still built fortunes in trade, but also in banking and investments (at least until the economic crisis of 1643 that affected most northern European trading cities, Amsterdam and

¹²⁸ Cole, *Great Mirror*, 5–6. On Comte de Floor, *Copie van de Derde Brief Aan de Heer N.N. Wegens de opkomst of Beginsel der Actie-Handel, der selver Voortgang en genoegsaame Ondergang, so in Vrankryk, Engeland, en Holland, en verscheide voorname Voorvallen, in de zelve Opgekomen* (Amsterdam: Isaac Stokman, 1720), Knuttel 16489.

¹²⁹ *Koophandel van Amsterdam*, 830–57. Other pamphlets made the same explicit connections, see *Eensame Gedagten van Pasquin, Over den Actie-Handel; Waar in ook ontdekt worden de Schelm-stukken van den Chymist G... en van G.K.* (Gedrukt in de Actie-Wereld [1720]), Knuttel 16492; *De groote brand-Klok, getrokken door al de bedroefde ACTIONISTEN, Dewelke nu haar komen te beklagen, dat zy Liederen haar geheel Capitaal daar in verspild hebben, eenige hebben zig na Vianen, Cuylenburg en Ysselsteyn begeeven, andere hebben zig na Dolhuyzen begeeven, zo dat deeze Brand-Kloks-Luyer over de Steeden van Zuyd-en-Noord-Holland komt te Luyen over de Steeden, daar de zigtende Actionisten reeds zyn vertrokken, en ook de andere die staan te volgen.* (n.p., n.p., 1720), Knuttel 16494; *De Nieuw Paryse HARLEKYN Met zyn Fraayje RAARE-KIEK, komende uyt Parys, Met zyn Fraaije Raare-Kiek Kasje, al zwaar toezende op de slegte Amsterdamse KERMIJS; Reyzende door de geheele 7 Provintien, Vertoonende alles op een boertige Wys, en ze laate kyken door een glas inne de Keyke-Kasje voor twee duyten, over het spelen van al de Actien, in meest alle de Steeden van Zuyd-en-Noord-Holland, &c* (n.p., n.p., 1720), Knuttel 16496; *De Heer Law, in zyn Sondaags Pak. Poetelyk geïnventeert en retorykelyk gecomponeert, o Jan Baptista Houwaard* (“Gedrukt in ‘t jaar van Quincampoix, Ter liefde van’t soort van Lomberdoix,” 1720) [This pamphlet begins with a “Dedication an Ter Hern, Hern, Hern Her Her, ter Grosser Bughandeler, ter Doctor, ter Mufser Smous of Jooden, so Actionist in der Nagt, &c &c.”] Knuttel 16499; *Kuylenburg en Vianen, Belegerd door de Banqueroutiers en ACTIONISTEN* (n.p., n.p., 1720), Knuttel 16511.

¹³⁰ Prims, 8, 2: 156, 162. On later echoes, see *Ter Nagedagtenis van het Wisselvallig wonder Jaar 1763*, Knuttel 18875.

Hamburg included).¹³¹ Antwerpeners, like everyone else speculated on goods and on exchange rates. Major investors like Jacomo de Pret, an original director of the Ostend Company, carried out financial operations that resembled arbitrage and that many considered a form of speculation.¹³²

Antwerpeners were also involved in the speculative windy business of the 1720s. Using straw men, they, too, played the Amsterdam market, participating especially in insurance, and they were similarly active in Paris. The De Pret house, for example, became deeply involved and lost deeply as well after taking up large sums in “term letters which were not able to be paid off in inflated currency.” By June 1720, no more silver could be found on the Paris market to back up the bills that Law had issued and De Pret queried an associate in Paris (the house of Horveau): “what can one best do with these bank bills? Should one park them in the bank . . . convert them into rents [secured] by the Hotel de Ville, or simply [hold on to them and] wait until the tide turns?” By mid August, all hope of gaining expected windfalls had vanished. November of that year found credit, capital, and ready cash hard to secure in Antwerp. “Money is here very tight, [a constriction] caused by the bankruptcies in England and in Holland,” De Pret complained to a business associate who had protested one of his bills: “I am still caught up in the disorders from England and Holland.” Yet the level of windy business that had blown across Holland never stirred up a similar cyclone in Antwerp despite the fact that many Antwerpens lost great sums of money in the Mississippi Bubble and dramas of insolvency occurred in a number of well-respected houses, some of which disappeared in its wake.¹³³

The Ostend Company, too, flourished in its early years and that initial success encouraged trade and speculation in its shares. News about the signing of the commercial agreement between the two Habsburg powers caused the value of the stocks to shoot up in the summer of 1725. Only a few months later, however, the alliance formed between France, England, and Prussia triggered a panic. Fears of war in 1727 exacerbated the situation. Stocks that had stood at 1228 guildens at the end of May, fell to 470 by 1 June. As became clear by the end of the year, as the allied powers, now including Holland, had determined on the destruction of the company, a renewed speculation arose in the company’s shares just when the company was entering its death throes. Men sold shares that they did not actually possess, erecting syndicates to influence and inflate their value. In May 1730, Charles VI concluded a treaty that forbade the Austrian Netherlands all trade with the East Indies; that sounded

¹³¹ *Antwerp: Twelve Centuries of History and Culture*, under the direction of Karl van Isacker and Raymond van Uyten (Antwerp: Fonds Mercator, 1986), 171, 234, 236.

¹³² Prims, “John Law,” 232; “De Oostendsche Maatschappij,” *Antwerpsch archievenblad* (1867): 383–459; J. Léon, *Wissel-arbitrage: Ten behoeve van het middelbaar onderwijs* (Arnhem: Thieme, 1868).

¹³³ Prims, “John Law,” 232–3 (De Pret quotes); Prims, 8, 3: 15. For more on De Pret, see Degryse, *Fortuinen*, 334–7.

the death knell for the Ostend Company and ruined many who had speculated in its stock.¹³⁴ Despite these alarms and excursions in the marketing of shares, Antwerp nonetheless suffered less of the economic dislocation that rocked Paris, London, and Holland.¹³⁵

The financial machinations and the depression of 1720 had not left Hamburg untouched, although the city escaped more lightly than either Amsterdam or Antwerp. Hamburg's magistrates, like those in Amsterdam, had moved quickly to forbid the formation of companies like either the Mississippi or South Sea ones and thus avoided most, if not all, of the immediate turmoil. Obviously, as in Amsterdam and Antwerp, the trade and financial connections that Hamburg enjoyed with major commercial and banking centers, such as London and Paris, meant that financial disturbances rippled outwards and struck Hamburg as well. As in Amsterdam, only a relatively thin slice of investors was seriously incommoded; admittedly, they lost significant sums. In significant ways, the 1720 event was more cultural than financial and more specifically financial than generally economic in its effects.¹³⁶

In Hamburg, the pivotal economic issue that piqued the concerns of those interested in merchant ethics – and in perceptions of impropriety – was bankruptcy, not speculation. Speculation in the sense of “windhandel” or “bubble trade” never evoked the fears, the commentary, or the satire that it did in Holland, Paris, or London. Of course, much moralistic agonizing about the perils of speculation existed in Hamburg, too, and the blame, throughout the century – perhaps predictably – tended to fall on the younger generation who had purportedly abandoned the motto of their fathers “to earn their living honestly” in a frenzy to get rich quick, and who, lacking the skills and patience of that older generation, often foundered.¹³⁷ Similar moralizing terms can also be found elsewhere in, for instance, the many publications surrounding the 1720s windy business in the Netherlands or in the laments about the decline of the enterprising spirit of the Amsterdammers from mid century onwards.

In the 1720s, speculation on the level of the various bubble-trades or attempts to establish what we might today call venture capital associations were prohibited in Hamburg. The story of speculation in early eighteenth-century Hamburg is instead closely bound up with the development of maritime insurance (*Assekuranz*). In the late seventeenth century, groups of individuals had combined to insure their ships and spread losses. Difficulties with fraud and quarrels between participants repeatedly arose and required the intervention

¹³⁴ Prims, 8, 3: 20–2. ¹³⁵ Degryse, *Fortuinen*, 301–12.

¹³⁶ Pierre Jeannin, “Die Hänsestädte im europäischen Handel des 18. Jahrhunderts,” *HGH* 89 (1972): 41–73; Walther Vogel, “Handelskonjunkturen und Wirtschaftskrisen in ihrer Auswirkung auf den Seehandel der Hansestädte,” *HGH* 74 (1956): 63–4.

¹³⁷ Christoph Ludwig von Griesheim (1760) quoted in Erwin Wiskemann, *Hamburg und die Welthandelspolitik: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Friedrichson, De Gruyter, 1929), 123.

of the Chamber of Commerce and the Senate. Subsequent developments in the insurance business approached the kind of speculation that provoked hostility in other cities. In that fateful year 1720, several merchants floated a plan for the founding of an insurance company based on stocks. The Chamber of Commerce supported their idea only reluctantly. It expressed "its heartfelt displeasure at the wild stock-jobbing that would follow," fearing more the problems such anonymous societies presented than being enticed by the possible advantages. Thus not until 1765 was such a company – the *Maritime Insurance Company* – first launched in Hamburg.¹³⁸ In the aftermath of bursting bubbles, the Senate forbade trading in stocks and thus quickly tamped down any drift toward windy business or stock swindles. Obviously, these prohibitions did not prevent individuals from participating in the trading of stocks and the fiscal wild-catting that took place elsewhere.¹³⁹

After 1720, speculation was a word that conjured up extremely negative, even fearsome, images; speculator became a common term of abuse. Speculation continued, of course, both in goods and in negotiable paper, such as bills of exchange. Each speculative fling called back into the lists the knights of business morality who tilted against bubble trades and windy business. It mattered little that the real economic harm proved less than catastrophic and the decision to speculate was often fiscally sound. Pens were sharpened and the images reworked. Speculation remained a term of vilification designating business immorality. At the same time, the link between speculation and another economic evil, bankruptcy, tightened.

The economic realities of the day made the elision of speculation and bankruptcy all too simple. The continued importance of the commission trade, the vagaries of delivery times, the perils of distance, and the persistent difficulties involved in obtaining accurate information about goods, services, and individuals, meant that anxiety inevitably accompanied trade. Merchants, individually and as groups, worried, and worried a lot, about all these things. Their response, however, was not to fold their hands and rely on providence. Rather, they devised and implemented – or tried to devise and implement – controls and policies that, they believed, would mitigate the dangers while never severing altogether the lifeline of trade. The balance was delicate and keeping one's

¹³⁸ *Unvorgreifliche Gedancken, Das Assecuranz-Wesen, Hauptsächlich aber die in Hamburg aufgerichtete Assecuranz-Compagnie betreffend* (Hamburg: König, 1720); Caesar Amsinck, "Die ersten hamburgischen Assecuranz-Compagnien und der Actienhandel im Jahre 1720," *ZVHG* 9 (1894): 465–94; Schramm, *Neun Generationen*, 1: 105; Gerrit Winter, "Die Assekuranz in Hamburg," in *Recht und Juristen in Hamburg* (2 vols.; Cologne: Heymann, 1994), 1: 197–208. More generally, see Frank C. Spooner, *Risks at Sea: Amsterdam Insurance and Maritime Europe, 1766–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹³⁹ Ernst Baasch, *Die Handelskammer zu Hamburg, 1665–1915*, vol. 1: 1665–1814 (Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem, 1915), 181–4; Percy E. Schramm, *Kaufleute zu Haus und über See: Hamburgische Zeugnisse des 17., 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1949), 137–8; Vogel, "Handelskonjuncturen," 63–4.

footing difficult. It was also precisely the sort of problem that caused dissension between merchants as governors and merchants as merchants as well as generating differences of opinion *within* both groups.

Take, for example, the problems and fears associated with the development of the premium trade (*Prämienhandel*) in Hamburg in the 1730s. Premium trade somewhat resembled trading in futures and involved contracts concluded for the delivery of goods at a given point in time for a set price against the payment of a premium. Contracts did not name the parties to the deal; they specified only the amount. Thus drawers and receivers remained anonymous. Such blank contracts (*Blanko-Lieferungskontrakte*) could then be sold to others, rather like discounted bills of exchange, and easily passed from one participant to another. Although apparently this had been a usual practice in the whaling trade in Amsterdam (although forbidden for the all-important grain trade), the method appeared *avant-garde* in Hamburg in the 1720s and 1730s. It quickly became a matter for discussion in the Chamber of Commerce that expressed concern about a business which “had ruined many young people [that is, young merchants]” and that enriched brokers from the *courtage* (the commission fee) they drew on each contract.

Despite its disquietude, the Chamber of Commerce recognized that probably little could be done to deter the business, although it feared the trade’s speculative nature “would clearly discourage a turn-over” in real goods. That is, the premium trade would undermine more preferable active trade and shake the stability of Hamburg’s Exchange. Despite some dissension within the Chamber itself, and some doubt about whether the trade could actually be prohibited, the Chamber requested that the Senate declare all such business “null and void.” The Senate, however, refused to budge and represented the position – a position the Chamber of Commerce normally shared and staunchly defended – that commerce should not suffer needless interference “except in the direst circumstances.” It proved reluctant to act at that moment because it remained unclear “whether such trade offered more advantages than disadvantages to the public.”¹⁴⁰

The story does not end there and following it a bit further illustrates that while often merchants were governors, and governors merchants, splits on the advisability and rectitude of particular business practices repeatedly developed and were, as the following chapter on bankruptcy explores, challenging to mediate. Over the next fifteen years, the Senate and the Chamber of Commerce repeatedly revisited the matter as new constellations of support and opposition coalesced. A limited premium trade in whaling seemed a beneficial arrangement. In 1742, however, the Senate promulgated a mandate that characterized the trade in other forms as destructive of solid commerce. The mandate denied legal recourse to those who engaged in the premium trade; they could not sue

¹⁴⁰ Baasch, *Handelskammer*, 1: 138–9.

for debt, damages, or compensation. Four years later, the Senate forbade it entirely and cancelled all existing contracts.¹⁴¹

For a number of merchants this was a step too far, although they expressed more dissatisfaction with the cancellation of the existing contracts than the prohibition on concluding new ones. They much preferred that “such deals be put on a stable and proper footing,” so that “commerce *en général* will remain free.” Here, one must agree with the opinion expressed by Ernst Baasch early in the twentieth century that this entire episode demonstrated the indecision inherent in evaluating any new form of commerce and financing in the government and among merchants themselves. “Only one thing was perfectly clear; no one wanted to accept the idea of unregulated business.”¹⁴² Thus while much ink spilled in all three cities, if more in Amsterdam and Hamburg than in Antwerp, defending free trade and freedom from interference in business, few failed to perceive the troubles that might result if wish became reality.

Although the merchants and governors in all three cities immediately associated economic innovations and business ethics with political and civic virtues and vices, they reached no clear consensus on the effect that specific practices had. Despite the rhetoric denouncing speculation, it is quite evident that not everyone agreed on exactly what the effects of premium trade, commission trades, speculation in goods and money were and how much they corroded political and civic values. Another issue concerned merchants and governors even more deeply after mid century and that was bankruptcy. Here, too, the positions were far less clear cut than one might anticipate. Bankruptcy was, of course, an evil thing, but how bad, how culpable, and how damning was it in fact and not only in the negative rhetorical flourishes that inevitably accompanied it?

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 140–1; mandates of 9 November 1742 and 19 October 1746, *Sammlung*, 3: 1409, 1591.

¹⁴² Baasch, *Handelskammer*, 1: 142.

Virtue bankrupt

Two years after the mid point of the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson expressed in a typically acerbic manner an opinion that many contemporaries shared:

The commercial world is very frequently put into confusion by the bankruptcy of merchants, that assumed the splendour of wealth only to obtain the privilege of trading with the stock of other men, and of contracting debts which nothing but lucky casualties could enable them to pay; till after having supported their appearance a while by tumultuary magnificence of boundless traffic, they sink at once, and drag down into poverty those whom their equipages had induced to trust them.¹

Armchair commentators like Johnson found it easy to condemn bankrupts out of hand. For merchants and governors in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, however, the situation proved considerably more complex and riven with uncertainties. Assessing causes of bankruptcy, assigning blame, and determining innocence, in addition to unraveling the increasingly convoluted claims and counter-claims of debtors and creditors, had always proved a difficult task. Rarely, however, was it more encumbered with anxieties than it became in the long eighteenth century and especially after 1750.

A short history of bankruptcy

Scholars have generally dated the term and concept of bankruptcy to ancient Rome; it described a broken bench (*bancus*, a counter in the market and *ruptus*, broken). One who could not pay his creditors' claims had his bench broken. The actual physical destruction apparently continued in medieval and early modern times (as in the Italian city-states). Even when no one

¹ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, no. 189 (7 January 1752).

actually smashed furniture any longer, other concrete manifestations of a trader's inability to meet his debts, such as the *Schwarzes Brett* (literally a "blackboard," but actually a black list upon which the names of insolvent businessmen appeared), replaced it. Often posted in a prominent place on the city square, city hall, or in a conspicuous place in the Exchange, it stood for all to see. In Hamburg, a designation – and judgment – accompanied each name: "an unlucky bankrupt," "an imprudent bankrupt," or a "malicious or fraudulent bankrupt."²

Nonetheless, debt alone, even a debt that one was unable to repay, did not automatically render a bankrupt despicable in early modern mercantile cities. The issue was far more entangled and bankruptcy laws did not merely set punishments for insolvents; they, like bankruptcy laws today, provided for the satisfaction of creditors and shielded bankrupts and their families from utter destitution. How much consideration and protection one enjoyed, how easily a bankrupt could re-enter the world of commerce and respectability as a member of the civic community, or exercise political power, depended a great deal on the *type* of bankrupt he or she was perceived to be and on his or her conduct, before, during, and after the collapse. A detailed investigation of the civic dimensions of bankruptcies in the mercantile republics reveals these knotty realities as well as the implications contemporaries attributed to them and the moral, civic, and political lessons they drew from them.³

Not all bankruptcies were created equal. Law and practice always differentiated between innocent bankruptcies and criminal ones. Today, we allot them to two separate legal jurisdictions: civil and criminal law. The seventeenth and eighteenth century recognized similar distinctions but the problem of deciding whether a bankruptcy was unintended and accidental, and therefore without fault, or calculated and malicious, thus criminal, proved then (as now) not a simple matter to resolve. Current American and British usage applies the word "bankrupt" to anyone "under legal process because of insolvency; unable to pay debts; insolvent," recognizing at the same time a plethora of metaphoric meanings and ones connected to losing credit and reputation that have far older pedigrees; for example, "For farder Credit off your Worde, you will stande (I feare) for banckeroute" as the Catholic theologian Thomas Stapelton wrote in *A Returne of Vntruthes* (1566).⁴ Then as today, society

² Klefeker, 7: 738. See, for example, "Namen und Accorde derjenigen, welche Ao. 1785 an der Börse, affigiret worden," in CB, S/905, Designationen (Fallissements), 1759–1808.

³ Bankruptcy was, of course, not just a phenomenon of the long eighteenth century. Mark Häberlein examined in considerable detail a bankruptcy in Augsburg from the middle of the sixteenth century in which he considered a series of issues similar to those treated here. *Brüder, Freunde und Betrüger: Soziale Beziehungen, Normen und Konflikte in der Augsburger Kaufmannschaft um die Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 255–337.

⁴ Thomas Stapelton, *A retur[ne of vn]truthes vpon [M. Jewel]les replie Partly of such, as he hath slanderously charg[ed] . . .* [Harding withal . . .] (Antwerp: Iohn Latius, 1656).

could judge a bankrupt guilty or blameless. Dutch legal language differentiates between someone who is *falliet*, that is, not criminally insolvent and *bankroet*, a suspicious state that approaches criminality. Early modern German, too, acknowledged the same disparity and its significance. Zedler's *Encyclopaedia*, in the article "Banckerottirer," discussed those whose insolvency resulted from acts of God, such as fire, storm, hail, and enemy action and those who practiced deceit "by the appearance of truthfulness and honesty." This chapter analyzes how the three merchant republics grappled with just this problem and struggled as well with an ill-defined, yet troubling, intermediate category: that of the frivolous bankrupt.⁵

The following analysis pursues several themes. First, it discusses the ways in which each city handled bankruptcy cases. Second, it explores the contradictions and uncertainties inherent in bankruptcy law and in proceedings against bankrupts. Third, it elucidates the problems merchants and city governments faced in deciding the relative culpability or innocence of a bankrupt. Finally, it compares the anxieties felt about speculation and new business practices with concerns about those increasingly regarded as "malicious bankrupts" and who were often explicitly equated with frauds, thieves, traitors, and despoilers of the common good, as was the "fraudelysen bancqueroutier" François Joseph Mafroid in Antwerp in 1763.⁶ Once again, a series of individual instances best reveals the intricate and often perplexing problems involved and helps craft an interpretation based on real events that occurred over the course of the long eighteenth century.

While it is far too simple to argue that in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, contemporaries most worried about speculation as an economic practice and that in the eighteenth century bankruptcy replaced it, more than just a kernel of truth adheres to that assertion. Just as crucial, however, are the connections contemporaries drew between the two. For them speculation and bankruptcy proved two sides of the same economic bad penny. Very often early modern governors and merchants viewed speculation (especially speculation in money and finance) as the prequel to bankruptcy or at least the first step on a very slippery slope. Moreover, these failures in particular often fell into the category of "malicious bankrupt," or into the grouping of "frivolous" (*lichtsin-nige* or *lichtvaardige*) bankruptcy. In point of fact, of course, accidents and uncontrollable circumstances determined most insolvencies. Businesses tended to fail because of the still chancy circumstances attendant on long distance trade, for instance. Important here were factors of wind and weather but also critical were the typically elongated and attenuated chains of financial liability and credit. Second, while major bankruptcies always set the greatest waves into motion and shook the state and the economy most forcefully, they made up

⁵ OED, s.v. "bankrupt"; Zedler, "Fallit," 9: 183 and "Banckerottirer," 3: 312–13; "Bankrott," in HRG at <http://www.HRGdigital/HRG.bankrott> (accessed 5 May 2013).

⁶ FA, PK 440 (1763).

only a moiety of all bankruptcy proceedings. Smaller collapses, those involving artisans, shopkeepers, petty traders, and the like, occurred far more frequently.⁷ Nonetheless, beginning at the end of the seventeenth century and increasingly in the eighteenth century, the numbers of truly spectacular bankruptcies involving major houses of seemingly impeccable credentials appeared to rise steeply and, perhaps even more disturbing, seemed to strike with frightening speed and terrifying capriciousness.⁸

Of course, there was nothing new about bankruptcy or about the economic and social dislocation it caused. Diaries and correspondence chronicled business failures with as much regularity as they marked births, deaths, and marriages. Bicker Raye's faithful recording of events in Amsterdam included bankruptcies along with other notable occurrences such as executions and lighting strikes. Indicative, too, was the way in which the Hamburg Bürgermeister, and merchant, Johann Schulte, wrote to his son, Johann Jr., then just establishing his own business in Lisbon: "That in the last few days Wilhelm Engelbrecht's son has absented himself [from the city] because of his debts. And so also, [just] last Saturday, did the young David Schulte, son of the deceased Lorentzen Schulte, flee [Hamburg] because of his debts and 'retire' to his garden house in Ottensen" outside the city's legal jurisdiction. Characteristic was the interpellation of business, social, political, and family events.⁹

Obviously, major bankruptcies, too, had happened much earlier. One needs only mention the first suspension of payments by the Spanish crown in 1557 to make that case. In the late seventeenth and especially in the eighteenth century, however, these breakdowns appeared to have become organic parts of the very process of growth and expansion, or at least were so perceived; they seemed intimately related to the prosperity of the economy in some obscure yet disturbing manner. They also appeared to radiate outward from the failures of financial giants, such as the Prolis, Neufvilles, and Hopes, to affect

⁷ The records of the Desolate boedelkamer in Amsterdam and that of the Insolvente boedelskamer in Antwerp demonstrate this, as do, in a sketchier manner, the far less complete bankruptcy records for Hamburg. "Archief van de Commissarissen van de Desolate Boedelkamer" covers the period 1617–1852, in SA, inv. 5072. Records of the Insolvente boedelskamer, covering the period from late fifteenth through middle of nineteenth century, are found in FA. The records of the court of first instance in Hamburg, the *Niedergericht*, which handled bankruptcy cases through middle of eighteenth century, exist only in fragments, but there are some cases to be found in StAHbg, Senat, especially Senat Cl. VII Lit. Me Nr. 4a–4b and in StAHbg, Reichskammergericht, Bestand 211–12.

⁸ One should not overvalue this rhetoric; perceptions of, and commentary on, the frequency of bankruptcy were already obvious in the sixteenth century. Mark Häberlein, "Merchants' Bankruptcies, Economic Development and Social Relations in German Cities During the Long 16th Century," in Thomas Max Safley (ed.), *The History of Bankruptcy: Economic, Social and Cultural Implications in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2013), 20–1.

⁹ Johann Schulte, *Briefe des Hamburgischen Bürgermeisters Johann Schulte Lt. An seinen in Lissabon etablirten Sohn Johann Schulte, geschrieben in den Jahren 1680–1685* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1856), 127.

hundreds of smaller houses, firms, and individuals. One Dutch observer writing in 1773 noted that “from the earliest times onward, commerce everywhere has been exposed to ups-and-downs, advantages and disadvantages, disasters and alterations, poverty and wealth”; “never [however],” he concluded, “from such a series of accidents as in this eighteenth century.” The Brobdingnagian size of many unpaid debts elicited equally shocked expressions of distress. In 1773, the firm of Muilman and Sons held paper worth hundreds of thousands of guldens drawn on the bankrupt Herman van Seppenwolde; it was a transaction that also involved the by-then broken house of Clifford.¹⁰

The bewildering and disconcerting experience these cascading bankruptcies presented eventually led to the formulation of structural definitions of economic failure. While the moral tone never disappeared – almost all bankrupts were (and are!) considered more or less culpable – the recognition grew that the very structure of the economic world was inherently unstable and treacherous. Nowhere was this more striking than in the world of international trade and finance that demanded risk-taking not only to succeed but simply to exist. Apparently, the same conditions that nurtured the rapid rise of great houses and the accumulation of vast wealth also sped the fatal plunge of economic captains whose shipwrecks sucked down smaller craft. Political economists soon began to argue with greater frequency and insistence that economic disasters did not necessarily spring from personal moral flaws or even misfortunes but originated in structural factors that individuals and polities were badly placed to control. Merchants themselves, if quick to blame “poor business practices,” “unwise investments,” or even “deceit,” understood this reality and commercial law eventually came to express it.

Legal frameworks

Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg all developed legal procedures to deal with bankrupts’ estates and to satisfy their creditors. In no case, however, did contemporaries consider the arrangements ideal, or even adequate, in legal, moral, or mercantile terms. Each incident of bankruptcy drew along in its wake a string of legal problems that crossed, or rather blurred, the borders between criminal and civil law and muddled distinctions between acceptable and criminal economic practices. Bankruptcy never remained solely a civil matter even if a number of what we would today call civil suits crystallized around these cases. In Hamburg, for instance, many eventually found their way

¹⁰ *Gedenkzuil der noodlottige koopjaaren, of verzameling van plan, concepten, proposities, overweegingen en tegen-overweegingen, die, ter gelegenheid en ter wederophelping van de droevige commercie-tuimels in de jaaren 1763, en 1772 en 1773, van tyd tot tyd het licht hebben gezien. Met eenige begevoegde aanmerkingen, over de rederingen, en het bestier in de zaaken der insolvente boedels* (Amsterdam: Gerrit Bom, 1773), iii–iv, 10, 12, Knuttel 19015; “Extract uit de ordinaries Rolle der Stad Amsterdam, in dato 4 February 1775,” in SA, Bibliotheek, J 013 [on Seppenwolde].

to the Imperial Cameral Tribunal for adjudication.¹¹ Bankrupts, especially those who fled their jurisdictions, engaged in fraud, or proved out-and-out crooks who absconded with public money or assets belonging to others as well as what was left of their own goods, were usually considered criminals and pursued as such.

Amsterdam and Antwerp created special deputations – respectively the Desolate boedelkamer and the Insolvente boedelskamer – charged with the task of unraveling and coordinating the formidable and numerous issues bankruptcy raised. Each deputation inventoried remaining estates and decided how, and with what amounts, creditors would be compensated.¹² Major bankruptcies, such as that of the firms Clifford & Son and ter Borch in 1773 in Amsterdam, called for special arrangements. They were not turned over to the Desolate boedelkamer; instead the city constituted special commissions of merchants to deal with these.¹³ While neither system worked perfectly (and attempts to reform them repeatedly arose), both cities had in place a more specialized and probably more effective system than in Hamburg where, until 1816, no special court (*Handelsgericht*) or separate deputation dealt with bankruptcy issues or, for that matter, administered commercial law. Instead, all these cases came before the general court of first instance in the city: the *Niedergericht*. Even before the mid eighteenth century, the number of bankruptcies had grown so rapidly that it threatened to bring all the court's business to a virtual standstill.¹⁴

Bankruptcy law tended to develop in rhythm with series of bankruptcies and the new regulations usually made that quite explicit.¹⁵ The Desolate boedelkamer was set up in 1643 in Amsterdam “to wrap up all matters [involving] bankruptcies, abandoned and other damaged estates, and the like, while preserving each [person's] rights.” Until then, the schepenen decided all bankruptcy cases, much as did the judges of the lower court in Hamburg.¹⁶

¹¹ See index of Hans-Konrad Stein-Stegemann (ed.), *Findbuch der Reichskammergerichtsakten im Staatsarchiv Hamburg* (4 vols.; Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1993–5). Documents on the bankruptcy cases that were appealed to the imperial courts in StAHbg, Reichskammergericht (Bestand 211–2) and Reichshofrat (Bestand 211–1). See also Walter Paatsch, “Wie zwei Hamburger Kaufleute aus dem Konkurs der Schlemer Mühle zu profitieren suchten: Zugleich ein Blick in das reichskammergerichtliche Verfahren,” StAHbg, Handschrift 2273.

¹² Not all the records preserved in the rich files of the Desolate boedelkamer (Amsterdam) and the Insolvente boedelskamer (Antwerp) are those of bankrupts or *falliets*. There are also many records of businesses that simply died naturally with the passing of their owners or were dissolved by mutual consent.

¹³ Aafke Meilink, “Amsterdam in de jaaren 1750–1780,” *Banknummer van het Algemeen Handelsblad* (16 January 1938): 11.

¹⁴ Daniel Heinrich Jacobi, *Geschichte des Hamburger Niedergerichts* (Hamburg: Nolte, 1866), 134; Klefeker, 7: 73–46.

¹⁵ See, for example, the long pamphlet *Gedenkzuil*.

¹⁶ [Le Moine de L'Espine], *De Koophandel van Amsterdam, naar alle gewesten des werelds. Bestaande, in een Verhandeling, van de waaren en koopmanschappen, die men daar heen sendt en wederom ontfangt* (7th printing/edition; Rotterdam: Ph. Losel et al., 1753), 45.

Antwerp's Insolvente boedelskamer dated from much earlier; in 1518 the magistracy ordered all possessions and papers of insolvents to be placed in the hands of the sheriff. In the late seventeenth century, and sporadically though ever more insistently in the eighteenth century, groups of merchants drafted plans to improve the management of bankruptcy. Sometimes these proposals aimed at fine-tuning the existing system (as in Antwerp and Amsterdam) or projected a new one, as in Hamburg. Solutions proposed, or actually implemented, apparently never satisfied. In 1687, for example, in Antwerp, the magistrates noted "despite the many legal provisions" that existed, creditors continued to be cheated by "insolvent persons who liquidate their property," concealing it from their creditors and the law; thus the former "never get their rights." The wording is formulaic and characterizes thousands of other ordinances and mandates that pertained to virtually every aspect of life. One should, however, pay attention to the specific complaints registered and the language in which they were couched. Complaints abounded about the paltry or non-existent compensation creditors typically received. The common procedure, for instance, of selling goods at public auction and then paying creditors from the proceeds proved especially wanting; venal curators or overly sympathetic ones often allowed the wives of bankrupts to sell possessions before they announced a sale. Previous rules, such as those passed in March 1591, failed to stop debtors from hiding assets. In response, the magistrates added several clauses specifying more minutely detailed procedures for preventing fraud while bankruptcy proceedings rolled on.¹⁷

Bankruptcy law in the Dutch Republic dated back to the 1531 ordinance promulgated under Charles V. Despite the fact that eighteenth-century magistrates judged it to be "sufficient in itself," over time it had purportedly fallen into disuse and thus needed to be renewed, improved, and reintroduced. A concept plan of 1627 sought to close loopholes; the actual ordinance appeared only much later, in 1643; it was revised in 1644 and again in 1647 before the States of Holland finally approved it in 1659. It remained in effect until a second major reorganization occurred in 1777.¹⁸ Most snarled of the issues that all these reworkings addressed was that of the malicious bankrupt. Developing ways of defining what constituted malicious bankruptcy, distinguishing it from less culpable forms, and hammering out a hopefully foolproof way to handle claims, produced thousands of pages of proposals, counter-proposals, suggestions, and amendments. Even when the division seemed crystal-clear, as in Antwerp where, according to the placard of 1759, those who failed to

¹⁷ "Gheboden ende uytgeroepen by Mýne Heeren den Schouteth Borgemeester Schepenen ende Raedt der Stat Antwerpen op den 25 7ber [September] 1687," copies in FA, PK 467 and PK 2847.

¹⁸ "Archief van de Commissarissen van de Desolate Boedelkamer," SA, inv. 5072; "Advys van de procureur Genereaal over Holland, Zeeland, en Vriesland, nopens voorzieninge teegen de malititeuse Banqueroten," 27 April 1772, NA, 3.03.01.01, inv. nr. 5501.25. The "Advys" also recapitulated the history of bankruptcy law in the Dutch Republic.

present account books or altered their entries were immediately relegated to the category of “fraudulent bankrupts,” equivocality remained.¹⁹

No matter which ordinances one examines, and that includes the ones yet to be discussed for Hamburg, all followed a rather similar pattern. While each city introduced some peculiarities as to timing and methods, to say nothing of shifting terminologies, the principal points differed little. Paragraphs mandated the necessity of notifying authorities and creditors if one could no longer cover debts; set up procedures to ensure that no property was sold or hidden away; made arrangements for executors to be sworn and empowered to inventory the estate; provided for the sale, usually by public auction, of property; warned debtors not to leave the city; and specified in often quite extensive detail what debtors and their families were and were not permitted to do. Further paragraphs cautioned creditors not to file false claims. Each plan distinguished among types of bankrupts and different procedures applied to each. Finally, rules pertained to what might be called the bankrupt’s rehabilitation, detailing when and how a bankrupt would once again be allowed, for instance, to trade on the Exchange, leave his home or travel freely outside the city, and re-enter civic and political life.²⁰ The 1772 provisions for Amsterdam, for example, permitted the bankrupt and his family to retain clothing, furniture, and household wares necessitous for daily life; artisans, for example, kept their tools. The same ordinance warned the bankrupt in no uncertain terms that any bad faith attempt to conceal “goods, bonds, effects, or outstanding debts” would be considered “perjurious and deceitful and punished with corporal chastisement, banishment, prison, or [the malefactor] would be declared infamous.” As soon as an executor suspected such malfeasance, the bankrupt would be handed over to the criminal authorities. The same applied in a slightly different, and somewhat milder, form to any creditor who falsely claimed restitution.²¹

The authorities in all three cities worried incessantly, and obsessively, about how to control bankrupts from concealing assets. The 1687 ordinance in

¹⁹ Ordinance of 4 June 1759. Auguste Pierre Damien de Gomicourt discusses these measures in his *Le Voyageur dans les Pays-Bas Autrichiens, ou Lettres sur l'état actuel de ces Pays* (Amsterdam: Changuion, 1782–3), 3: 139–41. The general history and organization of the Insolvente boedelskamer in Antwerp can be found in J. Denuncé, “De insolvente boedelskamer als kern voor een Antwerpesche economisch archief,” *Antwerpsche Archievenblad* (1927): 204–39 and on the website of the Felixarchief-Antwerpen at www.felixarchief.be/Unrestricted/Folder_Boom.aspx (accessed 20 April 2013). For information on the Desolate boedelkamer in Amsterdam, the best description is that found in the inventory, “Archief van de Commissarissen van de Desolate Boedelkamer,” SA, inv. 5072, on the website of the Stadsarchief Amsterdam at <http://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/index.nl.html> (accessed 20 April 2013).

²⁰ In Amsterdam, for instance, when 5/8 of all creditors agreed to raise no objections to a bankrupt’s rehabilitation, the way was pretty much clear for him to return to normal life. “Archief van de Commissarissen.”

²¹ See, for example, for Antwerp, the “Ordonnantie aengaende de insolvente Boedels,” 1687, copies in FA, PK 467 and PK 2847; for Amsterdam, “Nieuwe ordonnantie voor de Desolate Boedelkamer te Amsteldam,” 1777; also in *NNJ* (February 1777): 291–335.

Antwerp, too, explicitly spelled out what bankrupts were forbidden to do in these circumstances, arguing that “the proper rights of creditors would be significantly reduced by [permitting] the sale of effects from the estate, whether by the *insolvent* himself, his wife, or third parties.” A prompt and careful itemizing of all goods, combined with the affixing of seals on movable property, promised to prevent this abuse.²²

Indications of the civic and political, as well as economic, issues that mattered the most in the merchant republics lie embedded in the text of bankruptcy laws. Trust was one; transparency another. Nonetheless, the often torturous wording and the meticulous, sometimes convoluted, obscure, or even contradictory definitions also convey a deep sense of indecisiveness and anxiety about how to judge whether a bankruptcy was innocent, criminal, or, for that matter, faked. Bankruptcy had never been solely an economic matter, but over the course of the long eighteenth century, and with greater urgency from about mid century onward, it grew into a central moral, political, and civic issue in the merchant republics. If bankruptcy never spelled immediate and irretrievable “social death,” it nonetheless formed a major talking point in civic life and a place where several and often discordant discourses of politics and morality converged.

Hamburg’s long and troubled history of crafting a new bankruptcy ordinance in the middle of the eighteenth century illustrates the inherent complications. Discussions about rectifying perceived inadequacies in existing rules and the several proposals advanced for their amelioration, improvement or replacement, reflect the concerns that excited contemporaries. At the same time, these proposals and criticisms reveal how often, almost reflexively, contemporaries associated bankruptcies with larger civic and political issues. Two topics assumed particular significance and provoked considerable commentary. The first concerned the improvement of mechanisms to satisfy creditors better and more rapidly. Apparently such creditors often waited years, and frequently in vain, for the settlement of legitimate claims. The second involved jurisdictional issues. When bankruptcies crossed borders, that is, when, as frequently occurred in these years, bankruptcies assumed international dimensions, fanning out from one commercial nerve point to tickle or convulse another, matters became exceedingly complex and could involve several competing jurisdictions. Fortunately, for the historian, both circumstances generated rich and informative documentation as contemporaries struggled to find their way through these legal swamps.²³

²² “Ordonnantie aengaende de insolvente Boedels.”

²³ The flight of bankrupts out of their original jurisdictions proved particularly frequent and troublesome and involved governments in sometimes intense diplomatic negotiations to resolve such cases. Thus, despite the centrality of commerce to all three cities, and the sophistication of mercantile expertise, commercial law often limped behind mercantile realities and nowhere was this more obvious than in the bankruptcies that crossed jurisdictional and territorial boundaries. See, for example, the pamphlets describing the prolonged negotiations between Hamburg and

Problems of fraud and collusion among creditors, debtors, and trustees plagued commercial relations in Hamburg as elsewhere. Hamburg's Niederg-ericht was notoriously slothful in its ability to handle bankruptcy cases.²⁴ Yet another reason exacerbated the problems and caused acrimonious debate and long delays: merchants could very easily imagine themselves in both roles, as debtors *and* creditors. As creditors, merchants might desire stricter rules on settlements; as debtors and bankrupts, they felt very differently. This mental dichotomy meant that drafting bankruptcy procedures required balancing two dissonant, if not actually irreconcilable, positions. The "new and improved" ordinance (*Falliten-Ordnung*) finally activated in Hamburg in 1753 had first been broached almost seventy-five years earlier, in 1678, and then desultorily discussed for decades; active negotiations revived again in the 1730s in response to what was at the very least a *perceived* increase in bankruptcies.²⁵ Later, this ordinance, too, would be found wanting and, toward the end of the century, several concerned merchants proposed the introduction of a commercial court to expedite and regulate the process.²⁶

The story of the 1753 Bankruptcy Ordinance tidily encapsulates all these ambiguities. The rules governing the treatment of bankruptcy embedded in the City Ordinance (*Stadt-Ordnung*) of 1609 had failed to stem what merchants in Hamburg worriedly perceived as an ever-increasing number of bankruptcies, to provide sufficient protection for honest bankrupts, to punish malicious ones, and to offer a swift, sure way of dealing with all.²⁷ A further ordinance from

Sweden in just such a case involving a banker from Stockholm, Hinrich König, with claims on a Hamburg inhabitant, in StAHbg, Bibliothek, omnibus vol. A427/22. See also Mary Lindemann, "The Bankrupt Takes Flight: The International Dimensions of Merchant Failure in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg," paper presented at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, 28–30 May 2009.

²⁴ Jacobi, *Geschichte*, 139–45.

²⁵ Ernst Baasch, *Die Handelskammer zu Hamburg, 1665–1915*, vol. 1: 1665–1814 (Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem, 1915), 189–198; Ernst Baasch, *Quellen zur Geschichte von Hamburgs Handel und Schifffahrt im 17., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (2 vols.; Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem, 1910), 1: 269.

²⁶ Baasch, *Handelskammer*, 1: 189–98, 203–6; Hans Mauersberg, *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte zentraleuropäischer Städte in neuerer Zeit: Dargestellt an den Beispielen von Basel, Frankfurt a. M., Hamburg, Hannover und München* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 280–1; Klefeker, 3: 241–360; "Neue Revidirte Falliten-Ordnung," 3 November 1648; and *Der Stadt Hamburg Neue Falliten-Ordnung, auf Befehl E. Hochedlen Rathes publicirt d. 31 Aug. 1753* (Hamburg: Conrad König, 1753). A bankruptcy ordinance for all the Hanse cities was promulgated in 1620: *Mandat, Der Vereinigten Teutschen Hånse Städte/ wieder die muthwillige Falliten und Bancquerottirer* (Lübeck: Samuel Jachen, 1620). Deliberations began in 1750–1 and resumed again in the 1790s on the establishment of a commercial court (*Handels-Gericht*) in StAHbg, Senat Cl. VII Lit. Ma Nr. 6 Vol. 3 and Senat Cl. VII Lit. Ka Nr. 1h. See also Johann Michael Gries, *Über die Nothwendigkeit und die Einrichtung eines Handelsgerichts für Hamburg* (Hamburg: Friedrich Hermann Nestler, 1798).

²⁷ The following discussion relies heavily on these several sources. The 1753 ordinance was often regarded as a sophisticated advance over previous laws and regulations. Paul Fischer, "Bankruptcy in Early Modern German Territories," in Thomas Max Safley (ed.), *The History*

1648 never made it into print. In 1678, the Chamber of Commerce empaneled a committee of four merchants and a lawyer to try again and that committee stressed the necessity “to distinguish legally between the intentional bankrupt and the unfortunate one.” A simple enough matter, one would think, but each obvious solution dredged up unsettling issues. The Chamber of Commerce wanted to prevent all bankrupts from leaving Hamburg and moving to nearby Altona, for example, where, with what property remained to them they might pose “harmful economic competition.”²⁸

The matter surfaced again in the period of political turmoil at the beginning of the eighteenth century that prompted the Emperor to send an imperial commission to Hamburg to halt the violence and mediate the creation of a new constitutional settlement. Serious failings in commercial laws figured prominently in numerous *gravamina* submitted by the Bürgerschaft. Little was done, however, and, by the 1730s, merchants were once again bitterly lamenting the many shortcomings of bankruptcy law. In October 1730, for example, the Chamber of Commerce complained about the truly shocking bankruptcy of the firm Müller & Schultz, that, according to the Deputation, had gone “bankrupt in an entirely planned and deceptive [manner].” Over the next twenty years, the number of bankruptcies continued to grow. Still the Senate did nothing, much to the disgruntlement of the Chamber of Commerce that, at the end of 1747, pointed out that “in these current sad and unhappy times numerous large bankruptcies have greatly damaged our Exchange.” In an earlier similar case from 1700, when faced with the bankruptcy of the firm of Brameyer & Engelbrecht, the Chamber of Commerce had petitioned the Senate for leniency, even though it knew that the firm had improperly used bills of exchange to conceal debts. The reason was simple: the merchants feared that if driven from the city, Brameyer & Engelbrecht would set up shop nearby as a powerful economic rival. Such contrarities and gray areas repeatedly cropped up in bankruptcy proceedings because of the inherently mixed nature of virtually all. Unsurprisingly, the new ordinance, finally agreed upon in 1753, did nothing to diminish the numbers of bankruptcies.²⁹

Nevertheless, many viewed the 1753 ordinance as successful in other equally consequential ways. It gave the city a better means of dealing with, and punishing, frivolous and malicious bankrupts while at the same time allowing unlucky and innocent ones better protection and a way to regain their economic and social positions. Incidents of bankruptcy, however, continued to move in rhythm with broader economic shifts, thus suggesting that economic swings – rather than bad business practices, frivolity, or deceit – principally

of Bankruptcy: Economic, Social and Cultural Implications in Early Modern Europe (London: Routledge, 2013), 180.

²⁸ Baasch, *Handelskammer*, 1: 190–2. ²⁹ *Ibid.*

underlay financial collapses. Some 535 bankruptcies occurred in the eleven-year period between 1766 and 1776 (not counting the fifty-four houses that collapsed in 1763). The amounts owed creditors varied enormously, but quite a few totaled more than 100,000 mark banco (the money of account): Nicolaus Schuback owed 458,222 marks and 5½ schillings in 1769; Friedrich Christian Wurmb, around 205,000 marks in 1771; Senator Jacob Krohn, 108,958 marks plus some smaller sums in 1776, and so on. It would be silly to deny that certain business practices, including the increased use of bills of exchange, did little to prevent, and might well have abetted, these bankruptcies.³⁰ The whole history of this development, as of similar ones in Antwerp and Amsterdam, illustrates the conundrums that merchants and governors faced and reflects the by no means unfounded fears of a business community struggling to deal with major commercial upsets. These very real dilemmas were exacerbated by, and fed into, other matters, and had many deeper moral, civic, and political effects.

The bankrupt: a political and economic liability?

Contemporary commentary on bankruptcy mixed several discourses. If the rhetoric on speculation was heated, that on bankruptcy positively frothed. Voluminous moral commentary bemoaned the decline of business ethics and deplored a sheering away from traditional, honest, respectable, and esteemed ways of doing things – ways that, moreover, had enlarged the credit and reputation of the polity while assuring its stability in political and civic terms. This rhetoric engaged several strong elements of civic and political discussion in viewing bankrupts as poor citizens and real menaces to the political health of the polity. Economic factors repeatedly crossed with political issues. In some instances, observers manifested concern about the reputation of their city as a place to do business. Foreign merchants and investors needed assurance that, in the case of insolvency, their claims, too, would be dealt with rapidly and honestly.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 192–5. The following is a numerical summary of bankruptcies that occurred between 1766 and 1776.

1766	56	1772	35
1767	60	1773	52
1768	50	1774	37
1769	56	1775	33
1770	50	1776	51
1771	55		

“Verzeichniße der eingekommenen Falliten nebst deren Summen, Seit A°1766,” in StAHbg, Senat Cl. VII Lit. Ma Nr. 4 Vol. 1c, fols. 51–60.

Civic and political issues involved in bankruptcy came to the fore most obviously in the ways in which merchants and governors struggled to define guilt and innocence, rectitude and guile, while allowing for the inscrutable workings of providence. Almost all bankruptcy ordinances distinguished among categories in which political and civic, as well as commercial, intonations sounded. Typical was the threefold division into the innocent, the frivolous, and the malicious. Hamburg's much contested and never published Bankruptcy Ordinance of 1648 differentiated between innocent and deliberate bankrupts, that is, wanton or even criminal ones. The first type merited sympathy and need fear no ostracism from the civic community. Anyone who found himself ruined "from unexpected and unpredictable disasters such as fire, or shipwreck, or other such calamities," and who freely "opened his books" to his creditors, need dread no blemish on his honor. The case differed, however, if the bankrupt "in a dangerous and deceitful manner, under the appearance of trust and belief, knowingly borrowed [and] used money or procured wares that greatly exceeded his capability [to pay for them]." It was also another matter entirely when he engaged in "bad and neglectful housekeeping, was a wastrel, built an unnecessarily large [house] . . . and lived beyond his means and station [in life]." Such was "like thievery" and caused "unacceptable damage and disadvantages to the common good, business, and commerce" and thus, he "like other persons detrimental to society," deserved severe punishment. Such a bankrupt, even when he managed to conclude an acceptable agreement with his creditors, "should never be allowed to assume any dignity [of public office] and, if he should already be so installed, that office should be taken from him." He was to become "a disreputable man," permanently without civic honor. *Any* bankrupt who fled the city immediately fell into the second category.³¹

The new ordinance of 1753 expanded the two groups into three, adding a middle category on frivolous bankruptcy. Although these paragraphs heaped more disgrace on the head of the evil-intentioned or willful bankrupt, punishment of the frivolous bankrupt was not mild. He, too, forfeited all civic offices, was declared incapable of assuming any public post, and was, for a short time, to be incarcerated. The innocent bankrupt, who "despite all caution and diligence" had been ruined was promised "all help" to get back on his feet as an expression of "Christian charity."³² Amsterdam and Antwerp drew similar distinctions in law and in the broader realm of public and political discourse.

Of all bankrupts as contemporaries categorized them, perhaps the most interesting and the most controversial was this one: the frivolous. It remained, however, an indistinct and, for that matter, a troubling category. The malicious bankrupt was a crook; the frivolous one imprudent, but curiously a man whose moral qualities – or lack of them – perhaps even more deeply threatened the polity. The Hamburg 1753 ordinance defined him as someone who "took

³¹ Sections 7–8 of "Neuw Revidirte Falliten-Ordnung," from 3 November 1648.

³² *Ibid.*, unpag. introduction.

on dangerous enterprises beyond his means and who engaged in forbidden stock-jobbing, premium trade and other equally [suspicious] windy business” and also those “who make speculation in bills their chief business.”³³ Here the situation becomes difficult to interpret, as well as considerably more fascinating historically because the boundary between malicious and frivolous proved anything but self-evident. Thus, we need to consider the role of bankruptcy in the polysemantic, ambiguous and often even ironic moral and civic discourses of the day.

Commentators, such as Van Effen and the other spectators, including the choleric Dr. Johnson, when addressing bankruptcy, followed much the same line as those who labored to produce bankruptcy legislation. With the innocent bankrupt they sympathized, perhaps even identified, but disdained the frivolous and reviled the malicious. *The Patriot* in the mid 1720s trotted out the stock characterizations that contrasted the frivolous bankrupt with the prudent merchant. The very first issue of that publication considered the bankruptcy of a prominent merchant house and targeted not the slings and arrows of outrageous business fortune, but rather the imprudence and recklessness of the people in charge.³⁴ A later issue was more apposite. In a portrait laced with anti-Semitism, it counterposed the wise and the foolish merchant in the contrived ant-and-grasshopper life-stories of two brothers. The younger, “Berander,” was by no means dishonest nor did he lack many good qualities, although keeping his nose to the grindstone did not count as one of them. He made unwise or inexpedient decisions, albeit hardly criminal ones. He lacked, however, a head for practical affairs and, during his apprenticeship, “dreamed great dreams [of easy wealth – the German verb was *wucherte*], like a Jew.” A lucky lottery ticket brought him a fortune that he invested unwisely, immediately set himself up expansively, rented an expensive house, employed an unnecessarily large number of clerks and domestic servants, and then “in part with his own, in part with other’s money,” launched great business projects. When he encountered financial difficulties, as he inevitably did, he pawned his wife’s jewels (jewels he should never have purchased in the first place) “with that sucker of Christian blood, a Jew.” When those debts went bad, he turned to other Jews and “one Portuguese [Sephardic Jew] after another sprang into the breach to prevent his having to reduce his household or that his bad credit” become known.³⁵

Here before us lies a sharply drawn image of mercantile frivolity. Other publications added some brush-strokes here and there: a love of luxury, purchases of horses and coaches, gluttony, and the like. The general picture remained identical, however. Luxurious living could make a frivolous merchant poorer, but his improper or ill-advised business ventures determined his ruin. Virtually all commentators categorized such levity as deeply dangerous to the broader economic, social, and political communities.

³³ *Ibid.*, 77. ³⁴ *Der Patriot*, no. 1 (13 January 1724). ³⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 31 (3 August 1724).

A more explicitly political pundit, the Dutchman Pieter de la Court, offered a clearer picture of what bankruptcy meant for society at large and not just for the merchant himself or the mercantile community. Any well-ordered and well-governed polity, he insisted, must first and foremost prevent and punish violence but “the *skulduggery* by which one steals another’s goods,” deserved equally serious chastisement as robbery “with *force*.” He bemoaned as well the laws and privileges that “permitted [or even encouraged] merchants . . . to make greater profits with *deceit*, than with honorable commerce.”³⁶ De la Court considered the “roguish bankrupt” a traitor to his country. Moreover, while he, too, expressed understanding for the innocent bankrupt, his pen dripped bile on the deceitful ones, especially those who fled, carrying as much of their assets with them as possible: one should consider these as “absconders [*vlughtelingen*] and evil-willed scoundrels” in just the same way as one did “those restless and thieving *bumble-bees* [*hommelen*], who should be banned from the republic” and “hounded even unto death.”³⁷

Many others chimed in and, toward the end of the century, an observer much exercised by the decline of virtue in the Republic counted among the critical civic values, trust, honesty, and frugality. These were as necessary to a commercial people as to a republican system and he wondered if “at this the end of the eighteenth century, we can find these in our nation [*Natie*] in the same measure as they were so evident with our forefathers.”³⁸ Reaping such Cassandra-like warnings from contemporary commentary is extremely easy; the rhetoric proliferated and one suspects that even its writers expected it to have little effect. Such verbal breast-beating hardly counts as *prima facie* evidence of decline; it is, however, indicative of how contemporaries tied together in one package civic and commercial virtues, even if the real overlap was not everywhere to be found or even everywhere equally esteemed.

Bankruptcy served as a trope in *belles lettres*, too, especially in theater. The 1720s had given playwrights their own chance to speculate: on the desire of audiences for comedies and dramas dealing with *Windhandel*. These spilled over in their dramatic actions into treatments of business morality more generally. The plays of Pieter Langendijk provide excellent illustrations. Langendijk was a damask weaver, as well as a major contributor to *The Great Mirror of Folly*. He became a quite popular playwright who employed mercantile themes in his literary works. His plays on speculation, such as *Quincampoix, or the Dealers in Wind* and *Harlequin, Stock-jobber* were *commedia dell’arte* farces about stockjobbing, but also he endowed his comedies (*klucht-* or *blijspelen* in Dutch) with higher purposes: in his own words, “namely, as guides to virtue,

³⁶ Pieter de la Court, *Aanwysing der heilsame politike Gronden und maximen van de republike van Holland en West-Vriesland* (Leiden and Rotterdam: Hakkens, 1669), 131.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 136–7, 140.

³⁸ IJsbrand van Hamelsveld, *De zedelijke toestand der Nederlandsche natie op het einde der achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Johannes Allart, 1791), 391.

without which everything is mere vanity.” Later, and in this same vein, he took a family gone bankrupt as his subject to illustrate mercantile virtues and vices in his *Mirror of Merchants*. It was an experience with which he may well have had personal experience. His widowed mother had run a textile business in The Hague that, according to his own account, had “an unhappy ending.” In this late work (published posthumously in 1760), he contrasts two generations. The opening scenes introduce the first one, that of the seventeenth century, in the figures of the worthily named Ernst and Hendrik. These diligent and estimable merchants built up good fortunes through solid business practices. Their sons, however, were wastrels and personified the second, eighteenth-century generation of less adroit, less responsible, and less civic-minded merchants mirrored in their very appellations: Lightheart (*Lichthart*) and Rake (*Losbol*). The moral of this cautionary tale matched the anxieties expressed more prosaically in bankruptcy law.³⁹

Johann Jakob Dusch’s play, *The Bankrupt*, combined similarly pertinent themes, but, as the title makes abundantly clear, took bankruptcy rather than speculation as its principal object. It appeared – by no means accidentally – in 1763. Very much a moral melodrama, it staged a scathing commentary on the business practices of the day that had supposedly driven out the solid mercantile virtues of yesteryear. The tragedy was, its author reported, “set into motion by the events of these [very] days” and was clearly meant as a *pièce à clef*. It did not take much, the author suggested, to decipher the real meaning and the real names of the characters, nor could one mistake the place “Dalem” for anywhere other than in the Low Countries, nor the scene for anywhere other than “this side of the Elbe”: that is, in Hamburg.⁴⁰

The dramatic tension arises from the attempts of one Gerrard to bankrupt his cousin, Erast. Gerrard was in partnership with Erast and demanded his money in “Harlem currency” because he believed that “Dalem,” where Erast had his money, was going bankrupt. Much of the action depends on rumors of bankruptcy: Dalem or Harlem? Equally important, however, are the personalities and qualities of the main characters: Gerrard and Erast. At various moments, different actors mouth stereotypical positions. Erast is the honest merchant cast in the traditional Christian style, a friend to widows and

³⁹ Pieter Langendijk, *Quincampoix, of de windhandelaars* (Amsterdam: De erven van J. Lescaillje en Dirk Rank, 1720); *Arlequyn actionist, Kluchtig blyspel* (Amsterdam: De erven van J. Lescaillje en Dirk Rank, 1720); *De spiegel der vaderlandsche kooplieden* (1754?), here from F. G. van Pesch (ed.), with introduction, *Langendijk’s Spiegel der Vaderlandsche Kooplieden* (Deventer: W. Hulscher, 1875), quote 11. Kees Smit has written the most complete treatment of Langendijk’s life and work: *Pieter Langendijk* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000), here 29, 153–7, 282–6. The *Spiegel* was the last piece Langendijk wrote and was finished by another playwright, *ibid.*, 269.

⁴⁰ Johann Jakob Dusch, *Der Bankerot, ein Bürgerliches Trauerspiel* (Hamburg: Dieterich Anton Harmsen, 1763), xi–xvi. Dusch (1725–87) was a poet, prose-writer, and sometimes playwright. His best-known work was *Moralische Briefe zur Bildung des Herzens* (Leipzig, 1759); ADB.

orphans, who honors his debts, and would rather perish in penury than cheat his creditors. When it is suggested to him that he could call in some debts from an old friend, he indignantly refuses and also refuses to use subterfuge to salvage his business: "I cannot save myself by deceiving [others]."⁴¹ This good Christian merchant recognizes that "the services that we render our fellow men, even if we lose thereby . . . are repaid through the secret and internal satisfaction [experienced]." When confronted with a broker who offers him a way out of his troubles, an outraged Erast indignantly rejects his schemes. The exchange between the two is peppered with commentary on virtue, honesty, good citizenship, and trust. The broker refers to Erast's bankruptcy, which Erast denies because "others have caused my losses." The broker responds that he should not be over tender in his reactions, because "bankruptcy is an innocent word." Indeed, it was "the most profitable commerce, the quickest way to get rich and to garner honor and respect." By cheating his creditors and by circulating ever more bills, one could grow wealthy, the broker crooned. "I know," responded Erast, "that knaves do so." The broker laughs: "Don't you understand our use of language better than that? . . . One finds crooks in the stocks or on the gallows, but no one regards a swell [riding] in a carriage, with three footman up behind, as anything other than a great man." Erast tosses him out. Dusch portrays Gerrard, the scheming cousin, as a villain. Nonetheless, some of Gerrard's ratiocination would have made good sense to many merchants especially when he despises Erast's traditional mercantile morality and pokes fun at his unwillingness to take risks – that is, to speculate.⁴²

The Bankrupt is obviously a morality play, but it must have resonated strongly in the climate of doom that hung over financial centers like Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, in that disastrous year of 1763. While we should not take fiction as a undistorted reflection of what merchants thought or felt in the middle of the eighteenth century, little doubt exists that the images of the "good and honest merchant" and the "scheming speculator" or the "criminal broker" were not unfamiliar, either as literary or flesh-and-blood types; audiences knew them as well as they did Harlequin. Tropes became models and models became tropes in an endlessly repeated, seamless round. Oh – in the end, Erast is saved; Gerrard is ruined; and the honest employee, Ehrhart, gets the girl.

The Bankrupt reproduces the heated rhetoric of the day and clearly demonstrates that the growing problem of bankruptcy exercised many observers who worried about the obvious economic and financial repercussions and quickly connected the increase in such bankruptcies to declining business morals. They branded such economic flaws and disasters as evils that threatened to tumble not only the credit of the city but also its very social and political order: bankrupts were political dangers as much as economic ones.

⁴¹ Dusch, *Bankerot*, 13–14. ⁴² *Ibid.*, 26, 28, 65–70.

Making money and going broke

It will probably come as no surprise that judgments made from the comfort of a writer's study were less quickly replicated in the rough-and-tumble world of business or in the involuted world of law. Nonetheless, the distinction between the ivory-tower observer and the person in the economic trenches proves far less clear-cut than may first appear. Many spectators in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg were by no means isolated from the daily mercantile and political world; some belonged to it. Their criticisms, if moralistically couched, often resulted from an intimate familiarity with the worlds of business and politics alike.

The mid to late eighteenth-century political economist, Johann Georg Büsch, offers one pertinent example of how practical mindedness and personal connections combined with intellectual pursuits. Büsch was the son of a pastor in Hamburg. He received an excellent education in the city's academies and then studied theology at the University of Göttingen. His career as a private tutor was short and miserable, but in 1756 he became professor of mathematics at the Academic Gymnasium and held that post for the rest of his long life. His interests, however, also ran to history and economics. In his academic position, he strongly influenced at least two generations of Hamburg's merchants, lawyers, and governors. Büsch engaged in, and planned, a wide range of philanthropic and civic projects. For example, he vigorously promoted poor relief reform, founded a Commercial School (*Handlungsakademie*), and helped establish Hamburg's Patriotic Society of 1765.⁴³

Büsch's considerable reputation in the eighteenth century as a political economist is all but forgotten today.⁴⁴ He, like Pieter de la Court, who was a successful cloth merchant as well as a prominent political economist and pamphleteer, or the playwright Pieter Langendijk, also a cloth merchant, formed living conduits through which ideas on political economy and civic engagement passed between intellectuals and belle-lettrists on one hand and active merchants and urban governors on the other.⁴⁵ Büsch's most noteworthy

⁴³ No full-length biography exists for Büsch. His four-volume autobiography is, therefore, a critical source: *Erfahrungen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann, 1790–4). See also ADB and Franklin Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte Hamburg und Altona* (2nd edn.; Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1990), 539–41. Wilhelm Stieda, "Zur Geschichte der hamburgischen Handlungsakademie von Johann Georg Büsch," *ZVHG* 15 (1910): 1–13 and Jürgen Zabeck, *Johann Georg Büsch: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und zur Methodologie der Wirtschaftswissenschaften und der Wirtschaftspädagogik* (Hamburg: Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät der Universität, 1964).

⁴⁴ Jürgen Zabeck and Frank Hätje, *Johann Georg Büsch (1728–1800): Wirtschaftliches Denken und soziales Handeln* (Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1992); Götz Landwehr, "Johann Georg Büsch und die Entwicklung des Handelsrechts im 18. Jahrhundert," in Hans-Dieter Loose (ed.), *Gelehrte in Hamburg im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Christians, 1978), 57–105.

⁴⁵ On Büsch's role as mediator, Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge*, 327.

contribution, besides his writings on poor relief and on free trade, was to craft a structural definition of economic life that theorized, in a down-to-earth manner, the ways in which Hamburg's mercantile economy reacted especially sensitively and immediately to broader shifts in the European and global economic environment. Not only did such perturbations cause impoverishment, they also determined business successes and failures. Tellingly, Büsch coined the term *Handelskrisen*, commercial crises, to describe these massive perturbations.⁴⁶

Dutch commentary, too, while continuing to harp on themes of frivolity – “luxurious and ostentatious living,” “the fevered scrambling after ever new ventures,” or even “the entire transformation of the national character,” as well as deceit – as underlying causes of economic disaster, also supported structural interpretations. One Dutch author, for example, stressed the “the ill-fated events for our country . . . in the history of our commerce” and ticked off a long series reaching from the 1570s to “that accused year 1763.” It was true that “such misfortunes . . . are not rare and each year produces several examples of bankruptcies, even of prominent firms. But when have we ever heard of so many [at once] and ones that are so interconnected? The year 1763 was the first of that sort.”⁴⁷

In this economic environment, questions about business practices and ethics and their connection to civic and political well-being revolved not around gain or affluence per se, but rather the organization of business in a manner that allowed the proper and stable acquisition of wealth in a commercial world where the size of fortunes often grew in reverse proportion to their solidity. Robert Beachy, in analyzing the evolution of bankruptcy law in Saxony in the early eighteenth century, argues that a crucial shift occurred from a pre-modern morality which “harbored ambivalence towards trade” to a situation where morality had “capitulated to the demands of credit-based commerce.” He continues that

As the bankrupt displaced the usurer as a subject of criminal prosecution, the once-dubious vocations of banking and exchange were increasingly glorified for their apparent contributions to the commonweal.

In Beachy's nicely illustrated example, an evolution toward the new practices and the requisite morality of a commercial society becomes a rather standard story.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Zabeck and Hätje, *Johann Georg Büsch*; Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 93–9.

⁴⁷ Bilderdyck, 12: 41; *Gedenkzuil*, 7–11.

⁴⁸ Robert Beachy, “The Eclipse of Usury: Bankruptcy and Business Morality in Eighteenth-Century Germany,” in Mary Lindemann (ed.), *Ways of Knowing: Ten Interdisciplinary Essays* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2004), 189. Historians of eighteenth-century France have traced similar evolutions that can be subsumed until the rubric of a “revolution in commerce.” Amalia D. Kessler, *A Revolution in Commerce: The Parisian Merchant Court and the Rise of Commercial Society in Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Junko

Thus long before 1700 merchants had recalibrated their ethical sights and come to terms with the new business practices (bills of exchange, discounting, and speculation) and the new possibilities that promised great riches but which also contrasted with, or directly countered, older mercantile values. While the spectators and moralists railed, merchants did little to return to time-tested values, if those had ever existed. It seems likely that they perceived little conflict between putatively traditional values and newer commercial practices. This hard-headed economic *Realpolitik* did not mean that merchants happily cast all sense of commercial propriety and mercantile ethics overboard. Nor was everyone willing to locate the root of all evil in recently introduced commercial practices. In the difficult times of the 1772–3 crisis, many condemned speculative trades and reckless bill-discounting for the disasters or for exacerbating them. Others, however, were not quite ready to throw the baby out with the bath water and believed that the trade in stocks and the use of bills per se bore little blame, although one found everyone “old babblers [who] possessed a superficial knowledge” of the subject and ascribed all disasters to the “decline of real trade.”⁴⁹

Of course, piety and a work-ethic still cleaved tightly to one another. Nonetheless, and surely by the close of the *ancien régime*, profit for profit's sake had gained respectability and characterized the consciousness of many merchants and those engaged in a wide variety of manufactures.⁵⁰ The anxiety that late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century people supposedly felt about consumption, luxury, profit, risk-taking, and commercial enterprise as a whole is less real than imagined. What nervousness bubbled up arose not from some deep well of fear that one's own moral fiber or the polity's civic values were being eroded away by the acid of greed, but rather derived more from concerns about the growing uncertainty of the economic world (although it would be perverse to suggest that such rhetoric and such apprehensiveness existed nowhere else). In short, interlocking economic and commercial changes began in the seventeenth century and were not fully complete by the 1790s. Part of this evolution, or even revolution, involved assigning a higher validation to commerce as a socially and politically useful force. That attitude had already existed for a long time in the merchant republics; indeed, it was their foundational belief. But a simultaneous sea-change was also in course. It involved a major reorientation in thinking about commerce and the economy, from an understanding of economic disaster as arising principally from

Thérèse Takeda, *Between Crown & Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

⁴⁹ *Vrymoedige bedenkingen, over de oorspronk der veelvuldige en steeds voortdurende bankroeten in de voornaamste handeldryvende steeden van Europa...* [translation from English] (Amsterdam: Fr. H. Dempster, 1773), Knuttel 19006, 1, 54.

⁵⁰ Wolfgang Nahrstedt, *Die Entstehung der Freizeit: Dargestellt am Beispiel Hamburgs, ein Beitrag zur Strukturgeschichte und strukturgeschichtlichen Grundlegung der Freizeitpädagogik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 162–5.

personal flaws or even the action of providence to a more structural analysis of the global workings of the economy. This structural analysis did not let individuals or firms off the hook, but subtly redefined merchant practices and re-evaluated the extent to which one might continue to be held responsible for failure.⁵¹

That redefinition proved easier because nothing that happened after mid century or even after 1700 was really new and many accommodations had already been made. Even in the early seventeenth century, as we have seen, speculative practices formed part of the economic strategies of extremely reputable and successful firms. The most prominent and thrusting companies, those with the greatest commercial reach and often, as well, the greatest political clout, also received the biggest press in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the lion's share of attention from historians over the past two hundred years. One such celebrated mercantile clan was the Trip family in Amsterdam whose stately home still adorns the Heerengracht and is easily recognized by its mortar-shaped chimneys. The Trips began as river traders. In 1614, Elias Trip transplanted his family from Dordrecht to Amsterdam. He was in at the beginning of the East India Company in 1602 as one of its chief participants. Like many others who held a stake in the Company, he regarded its ventures as an opportunity to enhance his own business and enlarge his profits, in his case by cornering the Company's market in copper and saltpeter (the greater part of the family's fortune came from the arms trade).

Stockjobbing, too, formed a major component of his business. Elias Trip engaged in the perfectly legal and respectable trade in stocks he actually possessed, but he also, if indirectly, joined in the blank trade and sold stocks he did not own, a practice that "belonged to the much depreciated windy business." Apparently, as well, he was up to his neck in Le Maire's dubious scheme to manipulate the price of East India Company stock. Elias Trip was not the only Trip involved in speculative practices that often crossed the boundaries others tried to maintain between licit and illicit trades. His nephew trafficked extensively in shares in the 1660s and his grandson, Louis, sank much capital in similar enterprises. Between 1657 and 1670, Louis held about 20 percent of his wealth in the stock of various East India chambers, although he drew only about half a percent profit from those holdings. Thus, it was not only

⁵¹ For a discussion of the history of business cycles and related structural interpretations, see Lars Tvede, *Business Cycles: The Business Cycle Problem from John Law to Chaos Theory* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1998). The discourse on the value and goodness of commerce varied quite a bit in the eighteenth century. One can identify a persistent distrust of commerce as destructive of political and civic virtue, a new valuation of commerce as the midwife of prosperity, and another concurrent discourse that noted the darker side of commerce and, especially, global commerce: the slave trade and harmful monopolies. For the last, see Anoush Terjanian, *Commerce and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-century French Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

fly-by-night investors and shadowy figures who speculated and sailed close to the wind; solid firms with large capital assets had also acquired a taste for innovative financing and investing. If lesser vessels capsized, crafts of great tonnage like the Trips breasted the waves and grew rich.⁵²

To what extent such trade, often censured by contemporaries, was actually harmful is debatable. The economic historian, P. W. Klein, who studied the Trip family in considerable detail, draws a positive balance, seeing in this sort of stockjobbing not a pernicious novelty but rather testimony to “the powerful creative capacity of early modern capitalism in Amsterdam, that led to an entirely new and amazingly rapid growth of a full-blown capitalism.”⁵³ In this world, the Trips were a success story; but change the names and the times, and very similar stories ended not in wealth and reputation but bankruptcy and disgrace.

Antwerp firms worked in much the same way if often on a smaller scale and, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century, diversified their capital perhaps even more vigorously; they actively sought new investments, involving themselves in national and international commercial and financial affairs. Thereby they also tied themselves to the instabilities of those markets. The career of Charles Proli demonstrates the possibilities and the pitfalls. Besides functioning as a merchant banker, he successively, and successfully, invested in sugar refining, cotton mills, real estate, and the colonial trade. He acted as the financial middleman for several governments and for a large number of wealthy French investors. He forged and maintained excellent connections with royal circles in France and the imperial house in Vienna. He, or rather his bank, advanced huge sums to prominent figures, such as f400,000 to Prince von Kaunitz in 1776. His father had been one of the original backers of the Ostend Company and had received from Emperor Charles VI a patent of nobility with a dispensation allowing him to continue commercial pursuits.⁵⁴

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Charles Proli was an important man, financially and, for that matter, politically. The Flemish archivist and historian, Floris Prims, described him as one who “lived large, assembled all

⁵² Pieter W. Klein, “The Trip Family in the 17th Century: A Study of the Behaviour of the Entrepreneur on the Dutch Staple Market,” *Acta historiae Neerlandica* 1 (1966): 188–95; quote 195; Pieter W. Klein, *De Trippen in de 17de eeuw: Een studie over het ondernemersgedrag op de hollandse stapelmarkt* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1999 [1965]), 171, 174–8, 182–3.

⁵³ Klein, *Trippen*, 183.

⁵⁴ *Antwerp: Twelve Centuries of History and Culture* (Brussels: Fonds Mercator, 1986), 236. On the Proli business, see Helma Houtman-De Smedt, *Charles Proli, Antwerps zakenman en bankier, 1723–1786: Een biografische en bedrijfshistorische studie* (Brussels: Paleis de Academiën, 1983) and the older work of Jan Denuncé, *Charles de Proli en de Aziatische Compagnie met inventaris van de Proli's nalatenschap* (Antwerp: Jos. Guillaume, 1932). Denuncé's account is considerably more favorable to Proli and his activities than the later work of Houtman-De Smedt.

sorts of valuable collections, [and] dreamed of becoming a count.”⁵⁵ Yet, he, too, went spectacularly bankrupt, squeezed in a scheme to create a new company for trade with East Asia at the very moment the Ostend Company was being liquidated.

Historical opinion varies on Proli; for some he was something of a crook, for others a talented, far-sighted businessman caught in a bad situation. Contemporary opinion, however, generally fell out negatively. Joseph II penned a scathing estimation: “Count Charles has always been a bad egg . . . and has never been very particular about the means he chooses to further his own goals; he has never inspired confidence [in me].”⁵⁶ The fact that Proli’s activities could be cast in those two very different lights suggests that in doing business he often put his head in the lion’s mouth. He was both a smashing success and a spectacular failure.

The moment of Proli’s downfall came from his involvement in the Asiatic Company. The whole enterprise developed in the brainpan of Willem Bolts (an Amsterdammer of German extraction); contemporaries often characterized him as an adventurer. One commentator, writing in the dark year of 1929, acknowledged the uncertainties and the real ambiguities such projects always involved, but shrugged his shoulders and suggested that “did not all European colonization begin in just this way?” At age 19, Bolts had gone to work for the English East India Company and made a fortune in India in ways that do not perhaps bear careful scrutiny. When the Company uncovered his double-dealing, he quickly took ship home, abandoning the vast majority of his ill-gotten gains in Bengal. Once back in England, he promptly declared bankruptcy. Despite the lack of funds, he managed to ingratiate himself with the Austrian ambassador to London, seducing him with promises to generate fabulous riches for Austria in the east if he could only return to the scene of his previous triumphs. The ambassador supported him and he obtained a concession (*octrooi*) in Vienna in June 1775 to organize trade with India.

He now had the necessary legal papers but still lacked the monetary wherewithal. His attempts to entice Dutch capital failed, but his efforts in Antwerp were rewarded: Proli and two other bankers signed an agreement with each contributing about £25,000 to the scheme. Bolts promptly went off to India where, sailing under a neutral flag (the Imperial one), he did well at first, at least until 1783. Then external events intervened; peace broke out between France and England and unfortunate shipwrecks occurred. As things worsened, Proli used all means at his disposal to inflate the stock’s value artificially, but the end drew ever nearer and, by 1784, the stock stood at only 38 percent of par. At the beginning of 1785, the company asked for a year’s postponement

⁵⁵ “De Asiatische Compagnie,” *Antwerpiensia* 3 (1929): 175.

⁵⁶ Joseph II quoted in Denuncé, *Charles de Proli*, 14.

of payments in order to cover its debts. At that point, the Pietro Proli bank collapsed; Charles was the major partner. “Never,” commented one historian, “had a greater financial disaster struck Antwerp.”⁵⁷

It was not only the three main participants who felt the pain, however. A whole range of others suffered and not necessarily because of their involvement in the Company but because they did other business with Proli. In the aftermath of his bankruptcy, creditors raced to file claims. Most victims lived in Antwerp and some were completely ruined; “one street alone lost f1,800,000.”⁵⁸ Other large-scale investors, including the Emperor Joseph II for 50,000 ducats and the “Widow Wulf” from Ghent for f400,000, booked losses as well. Unraveling the debts and satisfying creditors presented major administrative, legal, and political problems: of the eighteen sitting schepenen, only four raised no claims on the Company’s assets.⁵⁹ The bankruptcy literally took decades to settle and the final resolution staggered on until 1870.⁶⁰

Proli’s enormous bankruptcy exerted a pronounced dampening effect not only on Antwerp but on all northern Europe. Thus, and although never merely an Antwerp affair, Antwerp was the quake’s epicenter and where the most damage occurred. If Proli *et al.*’s connection with a shady adventurer like Bolts may seem bizarre and the projects he advanced hare-brained, one need only consider the exploits of Stiépan Annibale, the false prince of Albania (told in [Chapter 4](#)). The same themes snake through the bankruptcies of many major firms. While this may all seem at times unbelievably wild and woolly, such was how great fortunes, as well as great failures, were made. The same types of investments, combinations of clever and yet also very risky businesses, characterized other major crashes. External factors influenced, or even set in motion, the massive financial upheavals of these decades. Wars – beginnings, endings, or threats – often triggered them. Power politics, too, had a hand and protectionist or mercantilist initiatives could queer the pitch of what may otherwise have seemed reasonable economic enterprises. In the end, when the very ventures and practices that had once led to successes and profits – even *succes fou* and fabulous wealth – foundered, these previously capital-laden ships carried with them into the shoals all the smaller vessels they had in tow. These wrecks had come to seem ever more common over time, increasing in number and repercussions. Three bank crashes in Amsterdam – those of Clifford & Sons

⁵⁷ Prims, “Asiatische Compagnie,” 173, 175. Bolts also wrote a defense of his involvement and a history from his perspective of the Company’s affairs: *Recueil des pièces authentiques relatives aux affaires de la ci-devant société impériale asiatique de Trieste* (Antwerp: n.p., 1787).

⁵⁸ Adolphe Levae, *Recherches historiques sur le commerce des Belges aux Indes, pendant le 17. et le 18. siècle* (Brussels: Wouters, Raspoet, 1842), 212.

⁵⁹ Hendrick van Stralen and Dirk van Akerlaken, *Mr. Hendrick van Stralen: Aantekeningen uit zijne nagelaten geschriften* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1878), 1: 182–5.

⁶⁰ Houtman-De Smedt, *Charles Proli*, 168.

and Ter Borch in 1763 and the even more cataclysmic one of Leendert Pieter de Neufville – illustrate this convergence and these contradictions.

If the Seven Years War can be thought of as the first world war, the multiple failures in 1763 may perhaps just as legitimately be counted as the first victims of a new style financial disaster that would, with increasing frequency and force, radiate outward from one financial axis to affect others. The 1763 bank crisis began in Amsterdam, but soon rocked financial centers throughout northern Germany and Scandinavia. The fall of houses such as the Neufvilles in 1763 was traumatic and symptomatic. At the end of the Seven Years War, Europe experienced a widespread economic depression and a financial dislocation; credit, capital, and ready money all became scarce. Amsterdam and Hamburg had greatly profited from the war and an almost unprecedented stream of easy credit flowed out of both cities, Antwerp banks, too, if on a somewhat smaller scale, capitalized on the economic boom.⁶¹ All literally banked on the expectation that Prussian trade would vastly expand once peace returned. They were to be disappointed. Already in the 1750s inflation had begun to depreciate the value of banking currencies and resulted in a radical constriction of credit that was obvious even before the war ended. The inflation of Prussian currency after 1763 ignited a firestorm in the European money market that began in Amsterdam and then swept through northern Europe. Some fifty-four houses failed in Hamburg in 1763 alone and the number was considerably higher in Amsterdam. That same year inaugurated a period of depression and tighter credit, although by the 1770s credit was once again more easily available. These credit oscillations, too, marked the mercantile economies of the long eighteenth century: rapid credit expansions followed equally swift contractions. Such vagaries were becoming structural parts of the European, and even the global, economy.⁶²

The Neufville brothers and the Neufville bank were hardly the only major firms to fail in 1763, although that disaster evoked perhaps the greatest consternation and caused the most real damage.⁶³ Writing in his diary in October, Bicker Raye registered the shock felt throughout the city: “the bankruptcy of this estate took down twenty-five upright merchants [with it] and

⁶¹ Amsterdam and Hamburg bankers provided or arranged much financing for the war. Meilink, “Amsterdam,” 10.

⁶² Ernst Baasch, *Holländische Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1927), 238–40; Helen Liebel, “Laissez-faire vs. Mercantilism: The Rise of Hamburg & the Hamburg Bourgeoisie vs. Frederick the Great in the Crisis of 1763,” *VSWG* 52 (1965): 207–38; Stephan Skalweit, *Die Berliner Wirtschaftskrise von 1763 und ihre Hintergründe* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1937); W. O. Henderson, “The Berlin Commercial Crisis of 1763,” *EHR* 15 (1962–3): 89–102; Elizabeth E. de Jong-Keesing, *De economische crisis van 1763 te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Handelsmaatschappij, 1939).

⁶³ Wagenaar, 4: 271. The legal case is found in SA, inv. 5061, 649, Index to “Schepenen Seccret Minut Register,” as “Species facti wegen ‘t gebeurde van ‘t faillissement den gebroeders den Neufville, van denen na ‘t eindigen van den oorlog in Duytsland voorgevallen, met de copien van alle de documenten & stukken toe relatief,” (1763) fols. 38–48.

hundreds of others who, if they were not totally ruined, nonetheless suffered much distress.”⁶⁴

The reasons given to explain the fall and the echo it found in contemporary economics and politics reveal the ways in which the Neufvilles did business and expose the reactions of many contemporaries to their achievements and to their failures; public commentary tarred Neufvilles as speculators and parvenus. In his study of the Amsterdam patriciate, Johan Elias, himself a scion of an old regent and mercantile family, did not hesitate to finger the problem; he identified the same flaws that caused the Neufvilles to come a cropper in 1763 with other major bankruptcies in Amsterdam, simultaneously sounding the familiar moral tones raised a century or more earlier. He regretted the decline of “the steady, prudent practices in commerce of our fathers” that had “degenerated . . . into a wild and reckless chase after fortune.” Elias blamed “rash speculations” and “unrestrained bill discounting” for the ruin of “hundreds of houses, even some world-famous venerable ones.” He believed that the house of Coenraed & Hendrick van Son in 1764 and the firm of Jan & Christiaan van Tarelink in the same year had collapsed as a result of the Neufville crash. In both cases, these bankruptcies immediately touched regent circles: a burgomaster’s nephew ran the first company and Burgomaster Jan Tarelink himself the second.⁶⁵

Everyone recognized the calamitous effects of the war on Holland, despite its strict neutrality. Peace brought “an enormous trade in bills over this land” like a plague of locusts. According to contemporaries, the brothers Neufville “had engaged most vigorously in this practice.” The inability of the house to cover its paper caused “extreme apprehension . . . both in the city and beyond it.”⁶⁶ The event loosened a flood of pamphlets condemning the unconsidered traffic in bills that had occasioned the disaster as well as criticizing how it was handled in Amsterdam, pillorying the Desolate boedelkamer as inadequate and possibly even corrupt.⁶⁷ Clearly, the prosperous Neufvilles were not especially well liked in Amsterdam. Despite the family’s almost 200-year history of living and working in the city, the brothers had recently harvested much hostility by proposing to underwrite the King of Prussia’s plan to establish an Asiatic Company in Emden. Amsterdam regents’ own affairs would have been hurt by this competition and thus they refused to consider a plan to rescue the house that would have required an influx of about f1.5 million in capital.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Diary, Bicker Raye, 7 October 1763. ⁶⁵ Elias-1: clxiii. ⁶⁶ SA, inv. 5061, 647, 38.

⁶⁷ There are many of these. Typical were titles like: *Het Wissel en Wondertoneel. Van den Jaare 1763. Of Verzameling der Geschriften, Welke over de Veelvuldige Bakroeten zyn in 't Licht gekomen* (1763), Knuttel 18873; *De Boere Praatkring, of Aanmerkelyke Consultatie Tusschen Louw de Veenboer, Jaap de Baggerboer, Klaas de Visboer, en Krelis de Kaasboer, betreffende de Bankroeten van eenige groote Kantooeren, zoo te Amsterdam als elders. Met een Plan van Redres* (1763), Knuttel 18874; and the broadsheet with a print, *Ter Nagedagtenis van het Wisselvallig wonder Jaar 1763* (1763), Knuttel 18875.

⁶⁸ Johannes G. van Dillen, “De beurscrisis te Amsterdam in 1763,” TVG 37 (1922): 249. See also the extended deliberations in SA, inv. 5061, 647.

When Neufville fell, other houses, even great ones such as that of Hope & Co., probably the financially most impressive bank in Amsterdam, quivered. Nonetheless, the Exchange in Amsterdam recovered rather rapidly, albeit with some permanent loss of business to Hamburg and London as a result.⁶⁹

Exactly what caused any individual bankruptcy proves difficult to determine. Attempts to clear the books and satisfy creditors with the remains of the day offer some answers, but very often even the largest companies kept less than perfect ledgers and some deliberately dissembled. Bankruptcy proceedings, however, frequently turned up in the records of failed firms large numbers of bills of exchange and discounted bills, as well as evidence of speculative practices or risky business gone wrong. Of course, it may simply be tautological that risky business produces bankruptcies. Still, the sheer number of bills, when aligned with the mountain of rhetoric castigating speculative practices and malicious or frivolous bankruptcies, suggests that the conjunctures of commerce in these decades where use of bills was exceedingly common or even indispensable, facilitated the extension of credit, abetted the tendency for merchants to become merchant bankers, and encouraged a whole range of middling and smaller entrepreneurs to jump in.

The crashes of 1773 replayed many of the themes from ten years earlier. Reading the pages of, for instance, the *New Netherlandish Yearbook* (NNY) as it tracked unfolding events, imparts a distinct sense of *déjà vu*.⁷⁰ By 1773, the narrative that portrayed bankruptcies as rippling out from a single event or a discrete cluster of events had firmly rooted itself in the imagination: the same tropes appear here and the protagonists are similarly stereotyped. The troubles had begun in 1772; by January 1773, the NNY reported that what had been at the end of the previous year “a disturbing rumor” had quickly shown itself accurate. In words all too familiar, the NNY described the shock:

A respected commercial house, one that stood [as an emblem] of trust and solid wealth for over a century, and that had justifiably been regarded as resting at the very apex of firms in Europe, found itself in the utmost straitened circumstances and suddenly declared itself unable to honor its debts. The consternation and anxiety felt everywhere was as great as it was real; one had no idea how far the fire would spread and how many other houses would be consumed in the conflagration.”

Because trade, finance, and commerce formed links in the same economic chain, any such failure must inevitably drag many others along in its wake.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Baasch, *Holländische Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 239.

⁷⁰ The *Nieuwe nederlandsche jaerboeken, of, vervolg der merkwaardigste geschiedenissen die vorgevallen zyn* . . . [henceforth NNJ] appeared from 1766 through 1798 (Amsterdam: De erven van F. Houttuyn, 1766–82; J. van der Burgh & Zoon, 1783–98). It was the successor to *Nederlandsche jaerboeken, inhoudende een verbael van de merkwaardigste geschiedenissen: Die voorgevallen zyn binnen den omtrek der Vereenigde provintien, sedert het begin des t'jaers 1747* (23 parts; Amsterdam: F. Houttuyn, 1747–65).

⁷¹ NNJ (January 1773): 79–80.

According to the *NNY*, this disaster struck at the very basis of Dutch prosperity and commerce. It had three causes: “the unregulated movement of bills,” “alliances in negotiations,” and, most especially, “stock-jobbing which in most cases was nothing more than a windy business.” It was a predictable and uninspired catalog of woes. Observers had long held the same general flaws responsible for major shocks to the economy and it hardly surprises that they sounded again, and more shrilly, in the very difficult years of 1763 and 1773. The *NNY*, for example, explicitly compared the events of 1773 with the bankruptcy of the Neufville brothers a decade earlier. Much was the same, but the perturbations of 1773 affected more people; ten years earlier the numbers of smaller firms and investors hurt had been much smaller and foreign trade less affected.⁷²

Typical, too, was the flood of plans floated to restore credit. While the solutions were not everywhere the same, several points characterized most, or at least the most widely disseminated ones, and the discussions revealed continued uncertainty about the best path to follow: more or less regulation of business practices? Solutions, rather obviously, rested on the perceived flaws that had led to the disaster in the first place. Clearly, this was a transitional moment where moral concern about the erosion of old ways persisted and was amalgamated into perceptions of structural realities.

The *NNY* printed the entire text of a “Proposal” composed by several merchants that put forward ways to cope with the existing troubles.⁷³ The Proposal highlighted those frequently blamed banes of all good housekeeping and merchant propriety – luxury and opulence. The thrust of the Proposal, however, went in another direction as well and reflected the nervousness many merchants felt as ruin loomed everywhere, or seemed to. In requesting that bankruptcy cases not be sent to the Desolate boedelkamer (perceived as handling bankrupts with too much compassion), the authors suggested a significant shift in how bankruptcies would be dealt with; they asked for a special process to be set up that would also mandate the immediate sequestration of bankrupts’ goods.⁷⁴

While the *NNY* conceded that “luxury was an abuse, that often had very harmful consequences,” it was equally quick to argue that laws that circumscribe “the freedom of action and consumption in a commonweal like ours, which prospers through commerce, can be destructive in the extreme and raise up greater evils than one might first believe.” The *NNY* also expressed reservations about “special laws for special people.” In particular, the *NNY* fretted about losing the trust, and business, of foreign merchants once they

⁷² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷³ “Project tot Faciliteering der Circulatie van Penningen, in de tegenwoordige omstandigheden moerende strekken tot Maintien van het Crediet, ter Beurse van Amsterdam” or “Plan tot herstel van het vervallen Crediet,” *ibid.*, 85–94, 101–6.

⁷⁴ See the letter that several Amsterdam merchants sent to the King of Prussia, 30 August 1763, in SA, 5061, 647.

realized how the new rules would affect their bills of exchange, thereby deeply damaging the welfare of a commercial state. The authors of the *NNY* feared that weakening laws that protected merchants, and even the bankrupts among them, would decelerate the circulation of money by complicating the use of bills of exchange. At the same time, the *NNY* expressed something like a structural interpretation of business cycles and one that resembles that freedom of trading cities Büsch advocated.⁷⁵

The 1763 crisis, and even more the 1773 one, touched off new avalanches of pamphlet literature analyzing the problems and advancing a wide variety of remedies. Not surprisingly, one finds a great deal of by-then hackneyed moralistic commentary censuring poor business practices, an inappropriate desire to get rich quick, shady dealings, a fast-and-loose playing with bills of exchange, and, as always, speculation. Contemporaries bracketed these flaws with outright criminality and seemed unable to decide where the line dividing imprudence and rashness from criminality should be drawn. As the above discussion of the 1773 Proposal suggests, not even in the merchant community did consensus on these issues reign. Finger-pointing and blame-assigning were also not invariably directed toward Jews (although they were often handed a central role) or the speculative frenzies attributed to greedy, conscienceless parvenus. The emphasis on individual flaws, mistakes, and inappropriate actions never disappeared, although contemporaries were, of course, fully aware that macro-political events, such as war and peace, or the establishment or loss of a colony, could exert enormous impact on their economies.

If the very experiences of eighteenth-century crashes drove some political economists to think long and hard about larger conjunctures, it was still not clear what the solutions might be. How much tinkering one was willing to do, or could do, with the foundations of mercantile society proved a matter of striking complexity and one that generated considerable anxiety and heated exchanges. Some perceived, if perhaps a bit dimly, that perhaps the very things that had created prosperity lay at the core of the troubles that disrupted it and that little could be done to right them or that, quite frankly, the solutions promised more harm than good.

Contemporaries who remained tied to an analysis of individual moral failure erred badly as did the many later commentators who followed their lead. Merchants and governors, pamphleteers and political economists, viewed economic disasters, such as bankruptcy or speculation, as somehow contagious.⁷⁶ While, clearly, the bankruptcy of one major firm or merchant banker could cause others, that was not inevitably the case and perhaps the model itself is flawed. Take, for example, the fateful crash of the Neufville bank. It would be ridiculous to deny its sweeping impact. Nonetheless, not *all* bankruptcies or the difficulties

⁷⁵ *NNJ* (February 1773): 222–3.

⁷⁶ Skalweit, *Berliner Wirtschaftskrise*, 47. Contemporary descriptions frequently expressed the same sentiments.

businessmen suffered emanated directly from, or were caused by, that failure nor did enterprises fold for the same reasons. Historical studies, however, have almost unanimously connected the many failures of 1763, such as that of the firm Coenraad en Hendrick van Son, to that of the Neufvilles; Elias certainly did so. In fact, the van Son firm suspended payments about a year before the peace of 1763; Neufville six months later.

But it is not only the chronology that is suspect. Almost seventy-five years ago, Christiaan P. van Eeghen (himself a member of an old merchant family in Amsterdam and a partner in the house of the same name) carefully studied the van Son bankruptcy. Based on archival material in the Desolate boedelkamer, he detailed several incongruities, concluding that: “[I] found no single point of correspondence between the two bankruptcies.” He perspicaciously observed that the Neufville bankruptcy attracted a great deal of attention and published commentary (including in the *NNY*): “from which one or another later writers took the material for their histories.” As van Eeghen pointed out, articles and books written on the subject accepted a model of bankruptcy based on the *exceptional* case of Neufville – one that may not be widely applicable.⁷⁷

Repeated crises like those of 1763 and 1773 and the many smaller economic discombobulations accelerated the tendency of at least some political economists to accept or actually formulate structural definitions that rather closely parallel analyses modern economists have advanced. An article published in 2004 concludes that “aggregate risk inheres in the system as a whole, no matter how ingenious individual market participants have been in attempting to hedge their individual exposures,” that is, manage risk. It dismisses “agency-based theories that emphasize debtor moral hazard.”⁷⁸ Obviously, one cannot expect contemporaries to have perceived macroeconomic changes or applied (non-existent) economic theory quite so dispassionately as events rushed onward before their very eyes and palpably threatened their peace and prosperity. It seems safe, however, to conclude that the business practices, the moral flaws, the identified causes of economic crises presented in published literature, accepted by contemporaries, and propagated by generations thereafter, may not track reality. Obviously, as well, contemporary commentary never spoke with one voice, as the *NNY* response to the merchants’ proposal indicates. Not everyone, moreover, isolated the same problems as determinant. Nonetheless, a dominant, or perhaps dominating, discourse and analysis stand

⁷⁷ Christiaan P. van Eeghen, “Het faillissement der firma Coenraad & Hendrick van Son in 1762,” *Economisch-historisch jaarboek: Bijdragen tot de economische geschiedenis van Nederland* 22 (1943): 121–2, 129; de Jong-Keesing’s 1939 University of Amsterdam dissertation on “De economische crisis van 1763 te Amsterdam” has long been considered the standard work and, despite Eeghen’s criticism, remains important. Anne Goldgar, in debunking the 1637 “Tulipmania,” also demonstrated the fallacies of taking printed literature as an accurate reflection of the extent of a crisis and its ability to snowball.

⁷⁸ Isabel Schnabel and Hyun Song Shin, “Liquidity and Contagion: The Crisis of 1763,” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 2 (2004): 930, 965.

out, or rather a dominant discourse and counter-discourse formed the basis for discussion at the time. Yet it is important to step back occasionally and ask “well, what really happened,” as modern economists and economic historians are wont to do, but it is also critical to realize that what “really happened” was also what people *thought* was happening. The ideas debated, the arguments advanced, and the passions aroused in economic arguments meshed with broader mental structures and cognitive habits from other spheres, especially the civic and political ones. The cross-fertilization of politics and economics in the merchant republics determined the tenor of life in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg just as it forcefully shaped the discussion of business failures.

Doing business in the mid to late eighteenth century

How business practices shifted in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg in the decades following the Law debacle, and how contemporaries understood these shifts can best be evaluated by examining individual experiences in detail. The analysis concentrates mostly on the activities of large merchants and merchant bankers, those who also had the most political say, although, of course, a whole range of others, merchants of smaller format, retailers, and manufacturers, also conducted business and were also, if albeit at the lower and least influential end of the political spectrum, involved in political life and civic affairs. *Gros format* merchants and merchant bankers, however, were more likely to engage in what were viewed as new business practices and commanded capital, credit, and connections; the three essential “c”s for doing business on a large scale then as now. Second, if the documentary record for large firms remains fragmentary, that for small firms and retailers is even spottier except as bankruptcy proceedings which, while often tremendously useful, skew the picture toward failure.

The previous pages have followed the public history of crashes and economic downturns as they appeared to contemporaries and as historians have interpreted them. Bankruptcy was a macroeconomic phenomenon, and not only in the large crashes of 1763, 1772–3, 1783, and the late 1790s. Individual life-histories, however, reveal the strategies merchants employed and the lessons they drew from their contact with the rough-and-tumble world of business in these decades. These stories flesh out the ways in which individuals calculated their risks, made their choices, and cut the cloth of business ethics to fit public personae and market exigencies.

One way of conceptualizing the changes eighteenth century *gens d'affaires* experienced and wrought is to view those shifts as a metamorphosis, marking a decisive movement from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist system and mentality. This simple analytical construction boasts a long pedigree and considerable merit. Contemporaries themselves perceived these modifications as the passing of an older way of life and, looking back, described them in ethical and nostalgic terms, often, if not inevitably, strongly disapproving what had been

lost. The sense of the slow demise of one economic world and the birth of another arose in the eighteenth century and became part of standard analyses in the nineteenth century; it has often been carried over into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as scholars continue to dig for the roots of the modern economy.⁷⁹ Nothing, however, disappeared suddenly or vanished completely, as we have seen.

Percy Ernst Schramm, a good friend to, and sympathetic observer of, Hamburg's merchants, offers a cogent example. He portrayed the economic environment of the late seventeenth century as one in which a popular writer, Valentin Heins (1686–1704), easily combined modern instruction in how to keep books, balance accounts, and reckon up sums, weights, and measures with an economic mentality that supposedly characterized medieval businesses. He noted that Heins, “in his evaluations of positive and negative [aspects] . . . remained entirely in a world free of capitalistic thinking and, to the extent that he perceived it, rejected it.” Heins preached, for instance, the differences between earthly and celestial happiness: “Everything disappears, but what is built on belief in Christ is eternal.”⁸⁰

Heins underscored the transience of material gain: “Fortune’s wheel turns: What was on top yesterday, sinks today as if it would never rise again,” but it does.⁸¹ That commentary, and the mindset that accompanied it, was waning, and waning fast, even as Heins wrote. Admittedly, a sense of fatalism – of “fortune’s wheel turning” – remained and found frequent expression in memoirs and diaries well into the nineteenth century.

If macroeconomic structures and conjunctures forcefully shaped the world of business, individuals were not mere chaff blown about by sirocco winds of change. Individual decisions still mattered. Thus, the individual circumstances of successful, not successful, and sometimes successful, merchants reveal the ambiguities and anxieties of doing business in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. These narratives of business life show how merchants in some ways felt very much in charge of their fate, reveling in their skill and competence, relying on their judgment and mercantile acumen. They reveal the choices they made, the problems they faced, and the disasters they encountered, with bankruptcy being the most fearsome. The voices of individual merchants, merchant bankers, and businessmen offer a way to understand their comprehension of choices in the world of finance and trade and situate their experiences as

⁷⁹ The definitions of what constitutes a “modern” economy have, of course, not remained the same since the nineteenth century. See, for example, how Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude have altered the terms of analysis in a major work on the Dutch economy: *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸⁰ Schramm, *Kaufleute zu Haus*, 126. One might, however, wonder to what extent the moral sayings with which Heins peppered his otherwise sober, “how-to-do” book actually indicated a “pre-capitalist” mentality.

⁸¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 127.

they encountered and survived, or were crushed by, the economic dislocations of the mid to late eighteenth centuries.

The stories of the Trips and the Prolis give some insight into how two firms of size and scope traded and invested over the course of two or more generations, sometimes with continuing good fortune, sometimes with sudden spectacular failure. The De Prets in Antwerp, too, snugly fit the category of successful large-scale merchant bankers. As the seventeenth century opened, Thomas de Pret was a silversmith. His brother-in-law and business partner, Cornelis de Wael, dealt in mirrors and crystal. At first little more than small-time traders, they “climbed up to belong to the first [line of] patrician families” in Antwerp. Their ascent from not quite rags to riches combined strategic marriages, political power, luck, and business skills. The De Prets’ account books reveal a mix of enterprises and tactics. The ones from 1755 recorded, for example, a large number of “interest-bearing [paper] and obligations on . . . domestic and foreign cities and villages,” as well as loans to the Estates of Brabant and to clients in Amsterdam and Paris. Even more extensive were their affairs in England, where they held blocks of stock in the East India and South Sea Companies. They also participated in shipping and in financing cargoes in Goteborg. Business in bills of exchange and stock-dealing in various other trading companies, including those based in Copenhagen, Emden, and Gothenburg, round out the picture. Their reputation for probity added a soupçon of respectability to the otherwise dubious business ventures of the Prolis with whom the De Prets also did business.⁸²

The Le Grelles were cut to a smaller pattern, but still belonged to “the upper [ranks of] Antwerp’s citizenry” and were active in trade, manufacturing, and politics in the city from the late 1600s through the early decades of the nineteenth century. Starting out as pastry cooks, the Le Grelles later owned sugar refineries and invested in the Trieste and Fiume Companies. The three brothers who lived in the mid eighteenth century combined the silk trade with political activities in the city’s magistracy. In the 1790s, the youngest, Joseph Jean, built on family traditions dealing in silk, colonial wares, and government funds, but eventually left active trade and moved into banking as numerous others had done much earlier.⁸³

More examples can be drawn from Amsterdam and these suggest the dimensions of business and banking and the ways in which firms cobbled together what we would today call their portfolios. At the top of the financial and mercantile pyramid sat the Hopes. Of Scottish origin, the progenitor of the

⁸² The discussion of the De Prets here relies heavily on the introduction by G. Degueldre to the inventory of the De Pret family archive (“Archief van de familie de Pret en van de aanverwante families”), FA.

⁸³ Anne Fremault, “Bankier tussen oud en nieuw, Joseph J. Le Grelle: Bedrijfshistorische analyse van een Antwerpse privé-bank (1792–1830),” (Licentiaat, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1985), 2–5, 57.

Amsterdam Hopes, Archibald, settled in Rotterdam in the late seventeenth century. In the infamous year 1720, his brother and one son were living in Amsterdam; both worked as “stockjobbers in speculative issues.” In writing the history of Hope & Co., Marten Buist underscored the common pattern for many families whose financial fame and wealth later approached that of eighteenth-century Croesuses: their business first grew slowly, experienced setbacks, and then took off. When other companies and other men, like Clifford and Pels, had already built up huge fortunes of tens of millions of guildens, the Hopes were still only modest financiers and, Buist therefore concludes, “did not then deal in specie on a large scale.” Over the next decades, however, growth accelerated and the Hopes soon basked in the renown and respect accorded their solid business practice: “for [the house’s] consistent policy of covering risks,” but also, significantly, for the “high degree of continuity in its commodity trading.” Thus, a combination of banking and active trade soon sent the Hopes shooting into the financial stratosphere, leaving behind in less celestial orbits previous rivals, including those who were once so much richer.⁸⁴

By 1762, Hope & Co. had reached the pinnacle of its fame and fortune with a turnover of 47 million gulden. The collapse of 1763 which sent the Neufvilles and others spiraling down into bankruptcy, cut into Hopes’ profits but in no way threatened disaster; they recovered well both in terms of active commodity trade and financing. Others in their circle were less lucky. The quite considerable company of Raymond en Theodor de Smeth, “that great and world-famous house,” suffered “terrible losses,” but emerged intact if also in a greatly diminished form. Still, what amounted to a truly amazing growth for the Hopes again in the late 1760s and until about 1772 “must be attributed solely to their considerably enlarged share of the money trade in all its forms.” Even so, Hope & Co. never abandoned active commerce. In the late 1780s, for example, the head of the house, Henry Hope, consistently described himself as a merchant and the company, like those elsewhere, in Antwerp and Hamburg, traded extensively in virtually every commodity that promised profit and virtually everywhere across the globe. Hope & Co., too, could have boasted, as the Hamburg firm of Voght & Sieveking actually did, of “bring[ing] coffee from Mocha, tobacco from Baltimore, cacao from Surinam, and rubber from Africa.”⁸⁵

If the Hopes weathered with little permanent damage what had been for other firms the perfect storm of 1763, it was not quite so fortunate ten years later. The fall of the house of Clifford & Sons, and the liquidation of yet

⁸⁴ Marten G. Buist, *At spes non fracta: Hope & Co., 1770–1815: Merchant Bankers and Diplomats at Work* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 6–9. My account of the Hope Co. relies heavily on Buist’s volume.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 12–18; on de Smeth, Elias-1, 799; on the business of Voght & Sieveking, “Kleine Studien über Caspar von Voght. VI. G(eorg) H(einrich) Sieveking: Selbstbekenntnisse Caspar von Voght,” *MVHG* (1902): 396.

another major firm, Andreas Pels & Sons, a year later, set off a wave that swamped many small- and medium-sized enterprises; Hope, too, was affected. The problems arose from the major unforeseen bankruptcy of Neale & Co. in London. Hope & Co. managed these losses, but in the subsequent years the firm's luster dulled. The firm, however, continued into the twentieth century and became part of the giant ABN-AMRO bank in the 1990s. Perhaps the real reason for its slow decline, however, lay elsewhere; Amsterdam was losing its once dominant position as a center for bill-brokering and Hope & Co. suffered from a more generalized malaise.⁸⁶

The fate of another firm in these years, one of smaller reach and lesser capital, differed; nonetheless, several similarities existed. Here a larger economic crisis certainly hastened or perhaps even caused its fall. Bartholomeus van den Santheuvel was a merchant banker and partner in Barth. van den Santheuvel & Son; he also served in the Amsterdam vroedschap. In the 1760s, the company had deeply committed itself to speculative dealings in the West Indies. By 1777, the gilt was off the lily and "the firm had to suspend payments because of the enormous losses [it had sustained] . . . as a result of the decline of plantations in Essequibo [Guyana]." A threefold increase in the number of planters and settlements in the 1740s had encouraged investments, but hard times in the 1770s forced some participants into bankruptcy or at least financial embarrassment. When Santheuvel wished to obtain a safe conduct to travel to the West Indies to wrap up his affairs as advantageously as possible, his creditors protested fearing that he would use the opportunity to abscond. He subsequently forfeited his place in the vroedschap.⁸⁷

What members of firms stuck in economic crises or tottering on the brink of bankruptcy thought about their situation is much more difficult to recover. Where they exist, such reflections illuminate how merchants and merchant bankers did business and also how they viewed the propriety, or at least the wisdom, of particular business practices. Quite frequently, these sources reveal much about family life, politics, religious orientations, and even hobbies while remaining frustratingly laconic in discussing business.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, some

⁸⁶ Buist, *At spes non fracta*, 20–2.

⁸⁷ Elias-1, 950. On the colony and its plantations in these years, see Pieter M. Netscher, *Geschiedenis van de koloniën Essequibo, Demerary en Berbice, van de vestiging der Nederlanders aldaar tot op onzen tijd* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1888), 111–50.

⁸⁸ In 1965, Fritz Redlich wrote a short article on "Kaufmännische Selbstbiographien: Eine Sammlung des 18. Jahrhunderts," in Otto Brunner, Hermann Kellenbenz, Erich Maschke, and Wolfgang Zorn (eds.), *Festschrift Hermann Aubin zum 80. Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1965), 1: 320–35. Redlich worked from a three-volume printed collection of merchant autobiographies probably edited or written by Johann August Stölzer: *Merkwürdige Lebensbeschreibungen verschiedener Kaufleute und Handlungsdiener nach ihren glücklichen und unglücklichen Begebenheiten* (3 vols.; Hamburg and Leipzig: n.p., 1771–80). These stories were mostly drawn from Saxony and generally did not involve large-scale merchants. While these narratives contain a certain amount of material about business and some reflection on bankruptcy, Redlich concluded that "the collection is for . . . the *business historian* [in English



Abbildung 2

John Parish (1742 – 1829) im 74. Lebensjahre

FIGURE 8 John Parish (1742–1829), merchant in Hamburg, aged 74

in the original] not very useful.” Here, I have exploited a number of printed memoirs and a manuscript of recollections from Hamburg. This is just a small selection from a considerably more voluminous literature, much of which exists only in manuscript form. Many of these are more forthcoming on family life, religious orientation, politics, and even hobbies, than on business. See, for instance, the work represented in Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (eds.), *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). The current interest in ego-documents has also turned up some materials on merchants. See www.egodocument.net/egodocument/index.html (accessed 20 April 2013).

merchants did muse soberly on their business lives, and that of their forefathers, relatives, and contemporaries.

In 1795, the merchant and senator, Johann Michael Hudtwalcker (1747–1818) began to set down his family's history and his own autobiography. At age 48, he looked back on many years of activity as a merchant but, in describing his life, he also reflected on that of his father (Jacob Hinrich, 1710–81) and grandfather. His father came from a frugal household and at age 17 went to work with the merchant Meinert von Winthem who dealt in herring, other fish, and fish oil. His father began as did many other merchants in Hamburg: working for a retailer or small-time wholesaler. It was a simple life, innocent of all extravagance as Hudtwalcker described it: "The entire week was devoted to labor without pause, on Sundays he went to church twice, smoked a pipe with his beer, and in winter spent Saturdays in his room with a book."⁸⁹

After staying with Winthem for over sixteen years, Hudtwalcker's father set up his own business on a slender capital of about 5000 marks. His enterprise amounted to little more than a slightly larger than average store; he bought and sold to smaller retailers. In the 1740s and 1750s, his wealth slowly grew; he married, bought a house, then a bigger one, and acquired a garden. Like many compatriots, he prospered during the Seven Years War as "fortunate Hamburg enjoyed [the fruits of] peace . . . It was just then that [Hamburg] became for the first time a major merchant-state [*Handlungsstaat*]." Toward the end of the war, as paper and devalued currency flooded Europe, and when no hard money was to be found, "one was forced to think of other methods and [many] took refuge in the so-called bill-jobbing."⁹⁰ The discounting business flourished and banks extended credit on unstable foundations. The whole edifice came crashing down, as we know, in 1763 with the failure of first the Neufville bank in Amsterdam; literally hundreds followed.

Johann Michael's own formative years replicated much of his father's adolescence, albeit in somewhat wealthier circumstances. In 1762, at 15, he entered his father's counting house. His first duty in the morning took him to the Hamburg Bank where he "dealt with the accounts, including the few bills of exchange."

The main purpose of this [assignment] was, however, to collect outstanding money owed or [to give] the so-called "caution" something I found . . . a most unpleasant task [to do]. One bought and sold everything then on four-weeks credit. After six weeks, one began to ask [the debtor], if it was "convenient" to pay? Many rich merchants thought nothing of being "cautioned" several times, without really suffering loss of either their credit or reputation.⁹¹

The memoirs of another, considerably richer, contemporary flesh out the picture of business practices in the mid to late eighteenth century and impart

⁸⁹ Quoted in Schramm, *Kaufleute*, 193. ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 203–4. ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 216.

a better sense of how such merchants perceived the ethicality of the economic dealings common in their day. John Parish (1740–1829) is one such moneyed man. His early life had much in common with that of the Hudtwalckers, father and son: he began with little capital; he worked for other people; he eventually set up his own business; and he became an exceptionally successful merchant banker who amassed vast wealth. Indeed, his name became proverbial for affluence as the common saying “living Parishly” (*mal pörrisch leben*) implies.⁹²

When his father died in 1761, Parish assumed a business whose capital amounted to a modest 18,422 mark banco. Paying down the outstanding debts shrank that capital to a mere 3000 marks. Like others, he reaped great profits from the Seven Years War. Belligerents had relied on merchants for credit and the capital business during the war generated “an immense circulation of paper.” Thereby, “the wheel began to turn.” (Parish frequently employed the images of a wheel and of a personified capricious Fortune as he reflected on his life and business.)⁹³ A series of factors resulting from the war, Friedrich II’s devaluation of currency, the superfluity of paper money issued by the Swedes, provisioning for armies, and the like, encouraged bill-jobbing in previous unknown dimensions and in which the biggest and seemingly most stable banks participated. All these houses, however, accepted far more bills than would later seem prudent. Parish commented, somewhat wryly, on the seductive promise of such jobbing and his own position:

The business of accepting Bills when a Man’s Credit stands high, produces an easy earned Commission, it’s a business too which tends to give Consequence to the merchant, & his giddy Ambition is too apt to get the better of his prudence, seeing himself call’d on by the first rate Houses of Commerce, to give energy to Operations of Magnitude, flatter’d by being told that it was alone with houses such as his that matters of such a nature coul’d be transacted, & how few of us are proof against such Adulation [and] the Bait takes effect; the first part of the Work goes smoothly down; his former prudent Conduct had establish’d his Credit, & the moment he puts his foot on the Exchange, he is encircled & press’d by a Cluster of Brokers soliciting for paper – make your own Exchange, Sir! he does so, & finds that his exclusively, is readily consumed. What food for Vanity. He towers above his neighbours, & soon begins to fancy himself, the prop & pillar of the Exchange, & if this does not turn his head nothing will.⁹⁴

What a slippery slope it was. Even if one wished to halt, and if one actually possessed the nerve to “look into his Bill Book” and see how far beyond discretion he had traveled, any hope of retreat had long since disappeared: “[H]e must push forward in the Stream, even if he sees himself doom’d to founder in the Ocean; his employer then treats him with less Ceremony, they are both embarked in the same Vessel, and with her they must sink or swim

⁹² Richard Ehrenberg, *Das Haus Parish in Hamburg* (2nd edn.; Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1925), here, 1.

⁹³ Ehrenberg, *Haus Parish*, 8–9. ⁹⁴ “Journal From 1756,” 32.

[sic].”⁹⁵ Eventually, the machine breaks down “with a sudden crash” and carries everything with it:

This is, my darling Henny [Parish’s daughter], the true picture of a merchant, & such a one as I have been describing, I have more than once been in a similar predicament, but happily as often weather’d the storm. The anxieties felt, & the sleepless nights which I have experienced, when under such engagements, with the Love I bear my boys, all combine, to make me pray to God, that they may not be tempted, for the sake of any Commission to the risk of similar difficulties.

His sons were not spared and John’s later quarrels with them turned on what he regarded as *their* ill-advised speculative ventures and unnecessary expenditures on, for example, “French dinners.” His house, too, did not outlive him long; it closed its doors forever in 1847.⁹⁶

Parish participated heavily in bill-jobbing and speculation but survived apparently without suffering any tragic losses, although he is silent about this in his memoirs. Nonetheless, he registered the severity of the crisis of 1763: it spared only a “few well-built houses.” Not only “wild speculators” or imprudent merchants failed; even the most trustworthy were shaken into oblivion by the upheaval. The end-effect, however, according to Parish, was beneficial because the quake had removed a number of “totally dilapidated houses” from the Exchange and opened room for well-managed firms like his own and new ones to move in and up. The psychological effect struck deep and, again in his eyes, proved salutary. Among the several positive results, he counted two as the most important. The debacle had nurtured considerable skepticism about trust in business matters and also drove a turning away from “the excessive luxury” of the previous decades.

These ruminations bear a clear moralistic tinge and represent an ageing patriarch’s vision; yet Parish himself was no steady, cautious merchant of the old school, if such ever existed. He speculated, he extended capital almost recklessly, and he dared to embark in new enterprises as they arose. He moved into untested businesses with icy calm; he made a mint in exploiting the eastern European grain trade and played with consummate skill in the complicated operations of the rebellious American colonies. Both were extremely profitable, if hazardous, short-term ventures. If one examines how he deployed capital, the hallmarks are not prudence, discretion, and steady acquisition, but rather bold strokes that must have required good nerves to carry through. In 1763, his capital amounted to only a very modest 4000 mark banco; he ended the century a millionaire.

In 1763 4000 marks was far too thin a basis on which to launch any major business undertaking. Then, and throughout his career, he relied on influxes of external capital, often going to loan-sharks (*Wucherer*) as he did in tight moments from 1776–9. He leaned heavily on the support of the Jewish banker,

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33. ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33 and “Journal from 1797 with regard to my sons,” *passim*.

Wolf Lewin Popert, in the panic of 1783 when the bankruptcy of Peter His & Son – a leading firm in Hamburg – carried down several others with it. On the West Indian expedition he had financed, Parish lost some 220,000 mark banco more than his total liquidity at the time. In the renewed crisis of 1793, his commitments amounted to over 8 million. His own cash on-hand totaled just half a million, a situation that would have broken most businessmen; by the calculations of the time, such an outlay required at least 2 million in ready money to support it. These were harrowing days for Parish, when he tottered more than once on the brink of insolvency and only quick action, credit from Popert, or strokes of luck saved him. The crisis of 1783 left him holding huge amounts of almost worthless paper and was, in his own words “the most desperate moment of my life”; he shuddered to recall it. It was a close-run thing, indeed. He was rescued from disaster by his connections and by that ineffable and volatile, but indispensable mercantile quality: credit. In this crisis, and in others, luck or coincidence, or meeting the right man at the right time, saved him.⁹⁷

If one detects similarities in the business practices of people like Parish or even Hudtwalcker with those of other merchant bankers like the Prolis, De Prets, Cliffords, and the Neufville brothers in Antwerp and Amsterdam, there existed, of course, still others, such as the smaller Neufville firm, that of Jan Isaac in Amsterdam, or of larger ones, like the Della Faille in Antwerp, where different styles of business pertained and where wariness or even timidity outweighed risk-taking. Admittedly, if the risks were fewer, the rewards, too, were smaller and even the greatest prudence never always forestalled deceleration, decline, or bankruptcy. Risk could never be eliminated even if governors and merchants strove mightily to do so.

Virtue bankrupt

No bankruptcy case can truly be called typical; many varieties existed. Contemporaries, however, confidently traced most at least rhetorically to “speculative practices,” “foolish investments,” and dubious business endeavors.⁹⁸ Explanations of bankruptcies, and analyses of their deeper social, moral, and political effects, assumed a rather standard story line, one that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, held on and was perpetuated in the nineteenth, and still had value – for historians and economic moralists – in the twentieth century (and, for that matter, today). If not all bankrupts were crooks, civic

⁹⁷ This description rests on Ehrenberg’s analysis of Parish’s capital reserves and capital acquisition in the second half of the century. Ehrenberg, *Haus Parish*, 126–8.

⁹⁸ Thomas Max Safley has recently made a strong argument for the necessity of adding an examination of individual business practices to a story that has usually tied “business failure ineluctably to the economic conjuncture.” “Bankruptcy: Family and Misfortune in Early Modern Augsburg,” *JEEH* 29 (2000): 48; Thomas Max Safley, “Business Failure and Civil Scandal in Early Modern Europe,” *BHR* 83 (2009): 35–60.

miscreants, or even economic wildcatters, the tools they used, or were believed to use, as Amalia Kessler has observed for France, “strained traditional concepts of merchant sociability” and even caused a “crisis in virtue.”⁹⁹ Kessler focused on business virtue, but the concerns went deeper and the connections stretched out from the economic to the political and civic realms. One can discern these narrative affinities clearly in the story of the merchants De Wolf in Antwerp.

We have already encountered Johannes de Wolf in the discussion of corruption in [Chapter 3](#); in his capacity as Antwerp’s receiver-general, he had embezzled about f142,000 from the city’s treasury. His story is also that of a bankrupt. The two tales in tandem usefully illustrate the intimate ties that existed in fact and in the imaginations of merchants and governors as they came to terms with his multiple crimes. An account from the first third of the twentieth century emphasizes not only his obvious theft but also, and just as portentously in this author’s mind, how he had thereby “driven down into ruin the venerable merchant house his father had built up and that his son-in-law directed.” He was a crook and a bankrupt, a civic and economic swindler all rolled into one. De Wolf’s father, Jan Frans, had run a large store in the center of the city, where he sold finished cloth, dealing in damask, sheets, shirts, handkerchiefs, and so on. Over the course of some twenty years, he had expanded his offerings and marketed a wide selection of draperies including English camelot (a woven fabric of goat or camel hair), fustian, velvet, and many others. He also manufactured some of these. He imported such large quantities of cloth from Norwich that his store soon became known as the “English Emporium.” It was a common story of accomplishment, drawn in strokes that painted the virtues of diligence, hard work, thrift, and honesty as the best way to achieve a moderate, but solid, success. The business began quite modestly, concentrated on particular goods, and expanded along these lines by sticking to well-trodden paths of merchant activity.¹⁰⁰

When his father died in 1751, Johannes was still underage and was entrusted to his aunt, “herself a clever businesswoman.”¹⁰¹ In 1755, Johannes entered the firm. It was “the start of a brilliant career that however . . . concluded with disaster.” This history paralleled the many fictional, moralistic-tinged tales of how great economic expectations had ended in bankruptcy or even criminality. Virtually the first thing Johannes did was to purchase a fine house on the Kaasrui, near the Old Exchange. He quickly extended his business, continuing trade with England, but also developing markets and

⁹⁹ Kessler, *Revolution in Commerce*, 188.

¹⁰⁰ A brief narrative of the history of the De Wolf firm and the bankruptcy case is available in two places, in FA, IB, Inv. 10², 161-4 and in *Antwerpsche Archievenblad* (1930): 11-17; see also Prims, 24: 116-17.

¹⁰¹ Degryse, *Fortuinen*, is filled with examples of women who ran all sorts of businesses and with often impressive success, competing with, and even outdoing, the largest (male-headed) houses.

courting suppliers in France, Germany, Flanders, Brabant, and Holland. In 1765, de Wolf partnered with two others to engage in *negotie*. Money deals soon became his primary business and the trade in cloth receded in importance. In 1782, when he was already receiver-general, he and the principals of the firm Solvyns joined to create Solvyns, De Wolf and Co.; the roll of shareholders reads much like a Who's Who of Antwerp's business, investment, and political worlds. The merger produced a substantial firm with multiple interests and wide-ranging investments. It pushed aggressively into overseas commerce and shipping. Besides a customary trade in cloth, the account books (described as "well-maintained ledgers") registered cargoes of wine, hides, wheat, linen, wool, and colonial products such as cinnamon, rhubarb, nutmeg, coffee, sugar, indigo, madder, grain, and beer. Everything seemed to go well: the business boomed, De Wolf grew rich, and his partners prospered. Then, in 1789 he was accused of using public moneys entrusted to him in private speculations and the firm was driven into receivership.¹⁰²

Similar combinations of theft and bankruptcy, if on a smaller and less scandalous scale, had appeared in the case of the 50-year-old Joseph C. B. Puttmans a few years earlier. Puttmans was employed in the financial offices of Brabant in Antwerp. He was also "an absolute scoundrel" whose crimes dated back almost twenty years. He had absconded with over *f*50,000. Beginning probably as early as 1767, he had "abused the trust that many persons had vested in him . . . [deceiving them and others] in a false and despicable manner." Once again, the frauds depended on his use of a series of fake bills of exchange to secure loans or purchase goods.¹⁰³

Despite the fevered rhetoric and the civic disapprobation bankruptcies almost inevitably evoked, bankruptcy alone betokened neither social, nor economic, nor political death, or at least not one devoid of all hope of resurrection. In the merchant republics of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, as in other urban centers, merchants lost their shirts, could not satisfy their creditors, and even fled jurisdictions, only to return to respectability and even affluence later. Not all were, of course, so lucky, but failure followed by success proved almost as common as that suspicious and hollow brilliant career that terminated in an ignominious end.

Examples abound. In Bontemantel's time, for instance, Dirck Teuling, member of the Amsterdam vroedschap and a director of the East India Company went bankrupt (apparently he was a *falliet*, a victim of circumstances) and, although he lost his positions in Amsterdam, regained status and authority as a captain in the Republic's armed forces. Jobst Misler, the youngest son of a large mercantile clan, enjoyed the best connections but his business (he was an "Africa-Shipper") failed in Hamburg in the difficult years 1772–4. He then

¹⁰² Details on the very long and involved process in the Insolvente boedelskamer in FA, IB, Inv. 1476–8.

¹⁰³ FA, V 164, fols. 117–19, 132, 135, 139, here 118.

sought his fortune at the Cape of Good Hope, but returned to Hamburg in 1776 where he became a citizen, married, and established another business, this time in haberdashery and other goods. Less than a decade later, in 1785, he sank once more into financial embarrassment and soon could not satisfy his creditors. He left Hamburg again, this time traveling no farther than Altona (just outside Hamburg) where he made yet another stab at business – without success. He was again bankrupt by 1792. Shutting up his shop in Altona, he again returned to Hamburg where he declared himself insolvent for the third time in 1810.¹⁰⁴ While this story lacks a happy denouement, it demonstrates how bankruptcy became for many merchants a business experience, one that they dreaded but which they could, and did, survive.¹⁰⁵

If bankruptcy did not quite disqualify a mercantile man or woman from later participation in business or necessarily bring down upon him or her the opprobrium of friends, neighbors, and business associates, it created troubling moments in the merchant republics and not only, or perhaps not even principally, for economic reasons. Bankruptcy, like speculation, but also like imposture and corruption, revealed contradictions in the business, political, and civic life of the merchant republics that, over the course of time, rooted themselves deeply into the history of all three cities and the collective psyche of its inhabitants. Much as it was increasingly difficult to define exactly what constituted corruption and to distinguish “corrupt officials,” “corrupt magistrates,” or “corrupt practices” from acceptable ones and as it had become ever more troublesome to determine who was what he or she seemed to be, so, too, was judging the innocence, or culpability, of a bankrupt, or the honesty and reliability of a trading man or woman, increasingly fraught.

Thus bankruptcy, once facetly viewed as the end of all respectability, has been shown here to be a far more complex concept for contemporaries who had to face the realities of deciding among innocent, frivolous, and malicious bankrupts and grapple with shifts in economic practices that had profoundly distressing moral, civil, and political ramifications. Generations of historians who have sought, and seek, to grasp what role bankruptcy assumed in the merchant republics have found themselves forced to deal with many similar problems of interpretation. With few exceptions, they have preferred to emphasize the disastrous social and political consequences bankrupts suffered.¹⁰⁶ This

¹⁰⁴ Bontemantel, 2:481; Percy Ernst Schramm, *Neun Generationen: Dreihundert Jahre deutscher “Kulturgeschichte” im Lichte der Schicksale einer Hamburger Bürgerfamilie, 1648–1948*, 1: 196–8.

¹⁰⁵ Merchant autobiographies from the latter decades of the eighteenth century in Saxony speak a good deal about bankruptcy and its effects. Fritz Redlich, in evaluating these sources, commented that “we hear in these accounts quite a bit about bankruptcies [and], considering how often [the subject] . . . appears in these pieces, must have been a daily experience.” “Kaufmännische Selbstbiographien,” 333.

¹⁰⁶ The work of Thomas Safley is one of those exceptions. See, for example, his “Business Failure and Civil Scandal” and the several articles in Safley (ed.), *History*.

chapter has tried to steer between the contradictions of rhetoric and reality in order to suggest the manifold ways bankruptcy functioned on several different levels simultaneously.

Moreover, while merchants and governors always recognized that broader economic and political events possessed the power to trigger bankruptcies, in the eighteenth century the sense grew ever stronger and was articulated more coherently by political economists and merchants alike, that movements in deep economic structures set off clusters of economic disasters that repeatedly, and often cataclysmatically, disrupted the worlds of trade and finance. At the same time, however, and perhaps curiously, as this embryonic perception of structural causes grew, anxiety also increased and the commentary about declining mercantile virtues ratcheted up in fervor. Risk seemed ever riskier and attempts to control it more futile. Individual mercantile flaws or moral failings had not caused the collapses of 1763, 1772–3, and the early 1780s, but many remained quick to blame individuals and dubious practices. As merchants employed ever more financial instruments to generate credit and to carry out their business, methods – such as bills of exchange and other forms of negotiable paper – became unavoidable but nonetheless remained suspect, as contemporaries compounded malignity in business with political miscreance. Many discerned a reciprocity between civic and mercantile virtues; corruption of the first undermined the republic while corruption of the second could signal economic disaster. What made up those virtues and the vices that were their mirror image was not clear-cut, either in words or in actions. That the two were, however, indissolubly bonded together, few governors and merchants in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg ever doubted.

Conclusion

The two words “merchant” and “republic” when fused into the amalgam of merchant-republic simultaneously describe a place and advance a historical interpretation. The qualities that have here defined a merchant republic – a republicanism congruent with commerce and a mentality that celebrated trade and valued its embodiment; merchants as the pillars of the polity and the vessels of republican virtues – not only existed in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, of course. Nonetheless, these qualities nowhere assumed a purer and more fully elaborated form.

Contemporaries immediately, almost reflexively, sorted all three places into the category of “renowned merchant city.” This identity proved durable and resilient, if also mutable, over the entire course of the long eighteenth century. All were able to respond creatively when the determinants of trade and business shifted, or in the face of altered political circumstances. Amsterdam, once the emporium of all the world and commanding the commercial networks of Europe, had by 1700 lost ground in the arena of active trade but retained vast reservoirs of capital and exerted enormous influence as a banking center. Although many merchants had become merchant bankers, rentiers, or even professional governors, the identity of the city as a mercantile power remained strong and the republicanism of Amsterdam hinged on that model as well. Hamburg’s history followed a somewhat different trajectory. Here the shift from active trade to merchant banking proceeded more slowly and remained less complete, but the trend was also strikingly evident by the middle of the eighteenth century. In Hamburg, however, no group of professional governors like the Amsterdam regents developed, although certain families and groups filled and directed the councils of government over decades. Moreover, as Amsterdam waned, Hamburg waxed and soon grew into the new commercial and information center of northern Europe. Antwerp offers a variation on this general theme, but one that harmonizes with a broader sense of merchant

republic. Already at the end of the sixteenth century, Antwerp had forfeited much of its economic centrality by losing its direct connection to the seas. Nonetheless, Antwerp, too, preserved its mercantile legacy intact and, like Amsterdam and Hamburg, became the center of a widely brachiated financial network.

In all three cities, a similar if not identical mercantile and republic sense pertained. Obviously, while not all, or even a majority, of inhabitants were merchants or merchant bankers (although a large percentage of each city's population lived from commerce in real ways), merchants and financiers assumed major roles in the urban economy, in civic affairs, and political life, and this, too, determined each city's identity. Merchants in Hamburg pretty much ruled the roost. In Amsterdam, even in the eighteenth century when the Dutch Republic found itself sinking ever deeper in debt and proving far less able to assert itself on the European and world stage, its merchants remained "in charge." Antwerp commercial enterprises and trade suffered a debilitating decline, yet merchant bankers still cut a high profile on the international capital scene and the sense of being a "community of commerce" never perished. The economic situation alone, however, did not solely determine what had happened in mercantile life and in politics in Antwerp: the city's position within the Spanish and Austrian Netherlands and the many nobles involved in government created a situation that differed from either Amsterdam or Hamburg. Yet in resisting centralizing initiatives and, to a very large extent, successfully retaining control over its internal governance, Antwerp, too, was equally a merchant republic.

External forces similarly conditioned the republicanism of Amsterdam and Hamburg. Amsterdam's premier position in the Estates of Holland and its virtual control of a trading empire, as well as its often conflicted and frequently oppositional stance to the stadhouders, molded the ways in which republicanism was conceived and expressed as, for example, "true freedom" especially during the two stadhouderless periods. Outside pressures less directly affected Hamburg's republicanism except in moments of crisis when, as at the end of the seventeenth century, the Holy Roman Emperor could powerfully shape events. The city also struggled (against Denmark, for instance) to maintain its independence and preserve an advantageous neutrality. As a small and militarily insignificant polity, Hamburg had to tread gingerly in dealing with its far mightier neighbors. Nonetheless, its political system presented perhaps the most developed form of merchant republicanism where merchants imprinted economic and political life directly even if, as elsewhere, a substantial contingent of men trained in law assumed an increasingly large role.

Within the merchant republics then, the antithesis of civic virtue and commerce did not exist in the ways postulated most famously by J. G. A. Pocock in *The Machiavellian Moment*. In a tour de force performance, Pocock tracked the intellectual spore of republicanism from the Italian city-states of the Renaissance through the end of the eighteenth century, analyzing like discourses on

commerce and virtue. He, and many others who followed his lead, were not necessarily interested in the quotidian actions of merchants and governors. Certainly, the discourses that contrasted “civic virtue” and “commerce” also existed in the merchant republics; it would be foolish to deny so obvious a phenomenon. Nonetheless, the tenor of those discussions differed: it was never commerce, the acquisitive drive, or the desire for luxury alone that was branded as detrimental to civic virtue. Rather, novel and potentially harmful business practices that departed from traditional ways – speculation being most obvious among them – provoked discontent and stimulated discussion in the public sphere of print as well as in legal affairs and business interactions; here mercantile ethics and political virtues cross-fertilized.

In articles written some years after the appearance of *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock acknowledged that a kind of “commercial humanism” had arisen and explicitly associated the right to property with the practice of virtue. He identified a series of “apologists for commerce” who argued that “the growth and diversification of human potentialities through the development in history of the capacity to produce and distribute was the true story of the human personality in society and that any loss of virtue which specialisation entailed was a price well paid for the increase in economic, cultural and psychic capacity.”¹ The merchant republics had little need for apologia. While vigorous debate continued over questions of what constituted good commercial practice and proper mercantile ethics and these discussions paralleled equally intense ones about the political values associated with the status of a republic, few expressed doubt that the merchant embodied civic rectitude and that mercantile virtues were identically civic ones.

Exactly what particular grapes contemporaries squeezed into the empty vessels of “virtue” and “republicanism” was, nonetheless, often disputed, sometimes violently. Some found one vintage more palatable than another, preferring the smoother aristocratic or oligarchical blend to the rawer taste of the more democratic version. At the very least rhetorically, merchants and governors shared, or thought they should share, similar values: honesty, responsibility, and trust. In this context, transparency – in governing, finance, and business – remained a highly prized ideal if not always, or perhaps even often, a reality. For precisely that reason, the imposter, whether in his or her social, political, or mercantile guise, manifested all the undesirable traits of dissemblance, mobility, and shiftiness that formed the antipodes of the civic and mercantile ideals city governors and *gens d'affaires* treasured. Often, too, they conflated nobles with imposters as they contraposed their own republican

¹ J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 50, 122; Henry C. Clark, “Commerce, the Virtues, and the Public Sphere in Early-Seventeenth-Century France,” *FHS* 21 (1998): 415–40.

systems to monarchies. Nobles were also deceivers and impersonators; like all imposters a shell of civility and *politesse* masked the superficiality and falsity – even the evil intentions – that assured their success at court. If real nobles rarely fit this image neatly, these fabricated renderings proved tremendously useful as a way that merchant republics and merchant republicans distinguished themselves, their political systems, and their virtues from monarchical ones. Even where one could argue that some governors had assumed noble-like lifestyles and status, as perhaps in Amsterdam (and even there the case was by no means clear-cut), they never strayed far from their mercantile roots. Antwerp differed because a large percentage of urban governors were nobles, although these men generally belonged to the lesser nobility or had been ennobled as a perquisite of office. The general malaise of business in Antwerp drove many to seek political posts as a livelihood (*broodwinning*) and one or another Habsburg ruler could use a patent of nobility to reward the faithful and ensure their continued support.

Even if a tacitly agreed upon form of republicanism guided merchants and governors in each city, harmonious agreement hardly existed on all matters of urban politics and economic life. While it is true that real violence only occasionally disrupted these polities, political stability remained contested and often quite fragile. Bitter conflicts and querulous wrangling over major and minor matters of governance proved endemic. Troubles repeatedly boiled up around defining and implementing republicanism, determining the exact degree of participation in government and civic life, and judging how trust was honored or abused within the circle of elites as well as between elites and other members of the community. Complaints about the “increasingly oligarchic” character of government greatly disturbed late seventeenth-century Hamburg and mid eighteenth-century Amsterdam, and not for the first time in either case. Few problems produced more animosity or were more politically useful than charges of corruption that focused on the distribution of offices at the highest levels and throughout the pyramid of civic and official posts. In Antwerp, other factors came into play. Although matters of corruption in government and the exercise of office likewise disordered civic peace there, more pronounced political disturbances came in the form of attempts to fend off the encroachment of the Spanish and Austrian Habsburg states as they strove to centralize their territories more rigorously and to rein in recalcitrant and independent-minded cities more forcefully. As the Broad Council in Antwerp sought to preserve “traditional Brabant urban liberties” it simultaneously attempted to perpetuate or revive greater participation in government.

In global terms, each city experienced dissimilar economic destinies over the course of the long eighteenth century, although without ever losing its fundamental mercantile identity. Despite the relative demise of Antwerp as an economic power, the shifting fortunes of Amsterdam as it left behind once and for all its “Golden Age,” and the rise of Hamburg as a major commercial

and financial center, common economic structures, conjunctures, and events affected them all.² The creation of an interlocked worldwide economy and interlaced financial networks that often knitted the three cities together meant that trade disruptions and financial disaster could immediately benefit, or wreak havoc, on any of them. Merchants and governors in each city similarly acknowledged the problems wrought by a “revolution in commerce” and conjured up by major alterations in finance and financial instruments. Speculation and stockjobbing were two very troublesome ones but so, too, was the cascade of bankruptcies that seemed increasingly prevalent especially after 1750 yet were clearly worthy of remark long before then. In all three cities the sense grew that neither moral flaws nor individual practices solely determined financial or economic success or failure, despite the continued (and still continuing!) castigation of economic criminals, wastrels, and rogue stockjobbers. The close connections between merchant bankers of grand format, such as the Prolis, Cliffords, or the Neufvilles, and a network of others inextricably tied to them certainly provoked commentary when the financial debacles of the first ruined, or seemed to ruin, hundreds of others.

Thus, over the course of time, debates about merchant virtues and ethical practices developed new tonalities in which the old theme of “traditional solid mercantile values” continued to sound, and occasionally even dominated, while at other moments a siren-song promising great returns through new financial ventures and a willingness to reassess risk drowned out moralist dirges. Tensions remained, however, and even grew in the wake of financial disasters. These were not, however, quite the same anxieties that purportedly caused so much apprehension elsewhere, in France or the Anglo-Saxon world, for example. In Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, even in moments of looming or actual disaster, little shook the conviction that commerce was inherently virtuous and that the merchant and the republican could cohabit the same skin, while, it is true, occasionally experiencing moments of itchy discomfort. The real issue involved the vexed problem of how merchants could assure their virtue and ethicality in a changing business, financial, and economic world. If some voiced distaste for “new and dangerous” or “ill-considered” business methods and trotted out the musty but apparently still useful tropes of “honest and steady acquisitive practices,” these expression of dis-ease usually arose from quite distressing disturbances in the world of business and rapidly disappeared when that world righted itself again, if only temporarily. For this reason, speculation and stockjobbing served as convenient whipping boys for righteous moralists like Muys van Holy or religious purists, but most merchants

² This may be something of a rash statement in respect to Amsterdam as there is another way of looking at the city’s economic fate over the course of the long eighteenth century: as the “first modern economy.” Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude. *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

engaged in them cautiously, modestly, expansively, or wildly. Structural interpretations of business successes and failures and of the inevitability with which the increasingly global economy of the eighteenth century cycled did not banish moral judgments about individuals or groups; they did, however, reorient and recalibrate them.

Equally embedded in the phrase “merchant republic” is the expectation that merchants ran their cities for their own benefit or, at least, those who governed, considered mercantile interests of prime moment. Yet governors and merchants as a group were usually directed more by a sense of what was good for the mercantile *community* as a whole, rather than only themselves as individuals. Their identity was always dual: merchants and citizens, merchants and governors. General concern for the mercantile community as an entity did not always trump self-interest, of course. Moreover, many of those who governed, especially in Amsterdam and Antwerp, no longer engaged in commodity trading; yet they remained or became merchant bankers and financiers of international format, cultivated links to families that pursued trade actively, retained strong social and cultural identities as merchants, and acted as guardians of the city’s mercantile well-being. These tendencies showed most clearly in Hamburg where the urban constitution guaranteed merchants a majority of seats in most governing councils and where men who became professional governors sprang from families with venerable mercantile backgrounds and who had brothers, fathers, and uncles, and often also sisters, mothers, and aunts, deeply involved in business enterprises. That situation also pertained, if on a more modest scale and in a somewhat modified form, in Amsterdam and Antwerp.

If and where merchants governed or governors promoted mercantile interests, to what extent did just those situations warp and deform republicanism? Was the phrase “governing for the good of the commonweal” merely a figleaf that inadequately covered the nakedness of greed? This book argues that merchants and governors acknowledged little difference between the commercial good and the public good, indeed could barely conceive of such a thing. Without buying into the sort of mentality that asserts that “what’s good for General Motors is good for the USA,” one must nonetheless give the sentiment some credence; commerce sustained all three cities and underlay the prosperity of virtually everyone in them (and that was the original meaning of that famous, endlessly misquoted modern phrase).³ Of course, how one sliced the economic pie mattered a great deal. Obviously, governors could feather their own nests quite nicely: one need only for a moment consider the contentious squabbling over the expansion of Amsterdam or about the distribution of jobs and posts in all three cities. Corruption was a discursive leitmotif but also a deeply felt

³ It is a misquote of Charles Erwin Wilson’s statement. While Secretary of Defense under Eisenhower, he commented that he would find it difficult to make a decision adverse to General Motors because “for years I thought what was good for the country was good for General Motors and vice versa.”

actuality. The governors of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg rarely made decisions or took positions that would, in their minds, have harmed commerce as a whole or hurt their own best interests. Nevertheless, it would be unfair and shortsighted to reduce them to economic figures entirely or condemn them out of hand as selfish graspers. Most adhered to a vivid and strong sense of civic duty and virtue and wished fervently to retain the respect of their peers. A man's status and reputation did not, after all, derive merely from the size of his bank account.

How much political clout merchants actually exerted is, therefore, a question that can be answered only on specific examples and not globally. For states like England, John Brewer's observation is apposite: "It was difficult for even the most powerful merchant groups to transmute their wishes into policy because they exercised no *direct* control over the actions of states."⁴ Even in Hamburg where merchants and governors were frequently identical and where merchants really *did* govern, mercantile desiderata often countered political goals as the many disputes between the Chamber of Commerce and Senate make clear. Arguments over the drafting of bankruptcy law, and particularly the agonizing over how to categorize bankrupts, assign blame to the guilty, or vindicate the innocent, reveal that merchants and governors by no means inevitably accorded with one another on the best course to follow.

Politics and self-interest often merged, as the discussion of corruption has indicated. The relationship, however, rarely was direct: it was oblique and usually veiled. Motives were mixed. The land speculation that accompanied the extension of Amsterdam's urban space, swingeing malfeasance in construction projects in Antwerp, and the manipulation of civic funds in Hamburg, demonstrate how men with political clout could and did exploit momentary situations and political events to their clear economic advantage. The opposition those endeavors evoked, however, testifies not only to the resentment of those who had lost out but also to a sense of propriety that drove them – some of them all of the time and all of them some of the time.

Correlating perquisites of public office with greater political programs or ideologies remains therefore a fraught and uncertain task. I have argued here for the specific and individualized character of political decision-making in all three cities, for the lack of "five-year plans," and for a general tendency to deal with problems as they arose without necessarily crafting or adhering to far-ranging, set agendas; the umbrella of merchant-republicanism allowed for a variety of solutions under its span. "Party" in the context of the long eighteenth century did not mean a laudable sense of program and direction but rather divisive and dangerous factionalism. The battles that some scholars have deemed an early form of class warfare, with, for example, artisans and lesser traders rising up against the machinations of the great merchants who

⁴ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 170.

controlled government – that is, a conflict between oligarchy and democracy or, as it has sometimes been phrased, between oligarches and proletarians – probably existed.⁵ In all these confrontations, however, it remains rather difficult to pinpoint the precise economic goals sought. Fiscal probity loomed far larger than any sense of class injustice; the latter surely is a wholly ahistorical concept in these situations. Economics and politics were yoked, yet the primacy of the first over the second remains a dubious assertion.

Finally, the focus on Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg as merchant republics suggests that, first, they were very similar and, second, that they were as a group somehow unique or, at least, very unusual. Neither is quite correct. The argument proposed here is more modest and maintains only that enough likeness characterized their political and economic histories to justify gathering them analytically under the rubric of merchant republic. In some curious way, the differences proved more real than apparent. If these cities seem more alike economically and in terms of business and commerce than politically, in neither aspect were they identical. Contemporaries regarded them as something like fraternal triplets and those perceptions have stimulated the historical interpretation advanced here.

The story of merchant republics, however, is not restricted to these three or, for that matter, to the eighteenth century. Merchant republics were always cities, but Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg were not the only examples. In the long eighteenth century they were the most obvious and probably the most important representatives of the species, thus justifying the definite article in my title. Others, however, also fit the bill even if their political orientations and economic situations differed, and that often dramatically. Cities like Bordeaux and Livorno formed parts of territorial states. Colonial empires and trade made others, like Charleston and Philadelphia, grow and prosper; they retained a unique quality in the new republic of the United States. Others, like Frankfurt, Nuremberg, or Leipzig possessed long mercantile traditions and one can identify many points of overlap in their economic and political structures with those of Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. In the eighteenth century, however, their importance paled in comparison and they functioned less as financial and information centers.

The history of the merchant republics provides a historical perspective not *only* on unique or highly unusual polities. Contemporaries regarded republics as rather odd political creatures and viewed them with suspicion and some mystification. Merchant republics may have belonged to a different political phylum but they faced many of the same challenges confronting virtually all polities in the Atlantic world: shifts in economic structures and conjunctures, battles over the sharing out of political power, debates over civic and political

⁵ See, for example, Cornelis H. E. de Wit, *De Nederlandse revolutie van de achttiende eeuw, 1780–1787: Oligarchie en proletariaat* (Oirsbeek: Lindebauf, 1974).

virtues and vices. Only one of these cities, however, entered the nineteenth-century world intact as a merchant republic as defined here: Hamburg. Amsterdam's financial power never dissipated entirely although most considered it much shrunken in its glory by the 1790s (or earlier); it was also later amalgamated into the new Kingdom of the Netherlands the post-Napoleon settlements established. Antwerp, too, became part of that same kingdom (until 1830). It, however, experienced a fortunate economic turn of fate, shifting from a trading to a manufacturing center and recovering its economic health on the tonic of the industrial revolution. The further history of the merchant republics in the nineteenth century, as well as how and why Hamburg persisted as a merchant republic and the others did not, is, however, a story for another historian's pen.

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